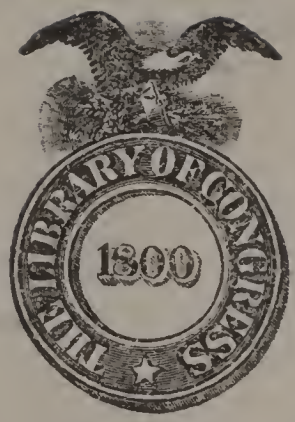

PRIZE WINNING
ONE ACT PLAYS

Compiled by
BILLIE ONEAL
(Mrs. Ben G. Oneal)

VOL. I.

THE SOUTHWEST PRESS
Publishers in and of the Southwest
— **DALLAS** —

Prize-Winning

ONE ACT PLAYS

Compiled by

BILLIE ONEAL, Comp.

(MRS. BEN G. ONEAL)

BOOK I

SOUTHWEST PRESS

DALLAS, : : TEXAS

TO MY MOTHER

whose encouragement and help made
possible my study and interest
in drama,
I dedicate this book.

FOREWORD

Through my activities in dramatic work, I became acquainted with the fact that printed Southwestern plays were very scarce.

Realizing that there is available in the Southwest a wealth of dramatic material which can be incorporated into plays and thereby made of use to dramatic organizations, schools and women's clubs, I have compiled this anthology with the hope that it may prove of value to those who have a desire for "recreation that will recreate" and that the production of these plays may lead to a wider development of Southwestern material into dramatic form. It is with the further hope that others may answer the urge to gather the traditions, the history, the folklore, the laughter and the tears of the Southwest and its people into plays that this compilation is made.

BILLIE ONEAL.
(Mrs. Ben G. Oneal.)

March, 1930.

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WHO'S WHO

MABLE RUTH STONG, the author of "Tombs," the prize play of the Texas Federation of Women's Club One-Act Play Contest, is a native of Oklahoma, though all of her college life has been spent, with one exception, at the College of Industrial Arts, Denton, Texas. The one exception dates back to the summer of '26, when she attended the Southern Branch of the University of California at Los Angeles.

Miss Stong says, "Although my major is still kindergarten, the field of Speech has almost lured me away from it. The play 'Tombs' marks my first attempt at play-writing, and was undertaken as an elective side-line to a drama course under the direction of Mr. Grover C. Shaw, director of the Speech Department of C. I. A."

Two other one-act plays have been written since by Miss Stong.

BILLIE ONEAL is the pen name of Mrs. Ben G. Oneal, the compiler of "ONE-ACT TEXAS PLAYS." Mrs. Oneal has been actively connected with dramatic work in Texas for the past fifteen years. When a student in Polytechnic College she wrote and staged a three-act play. After receiving her B.A. and B.O. degrees from that school she became a teacher of English and Expression, later becoming president of a Little Theater group,

and then directly connected with dramatic activities in women's clubs.

"The Inspiration" was the prize play in a contest conducted by the Woman's Forum of Wichita Falls. Mrs. Oneal is also the author of more than fifty articles and stories which have appeared in various magazines throughout the United States.

FRITZ G. LANHAM, congressman from the twelfth district, is one of the pioneers in dramatic work in Texas. His earliest activity came as a student in the University of Texas. There with the aid of his brother he wrote and produced plays that were the delight of the student body. His acting and play-writing proved so popular that he was prevailed upon to go on the professional stage, for a time.

Later, when engaged in the practice of law at Weatherford, Texas, he was the director of all plays staged by the high school. Then the urge came for him to serve in the great law-making body of the United States, the House of Representatives, and dramatic writing was put into the back ground. However, from his earlier interests we have the play "The Pedler," which Mr. Lanham says, "Shows a type of play we were interested in then."

Mr. Lanham is also the author of the book

"Putting Troy in a Sack," articles, plays and poems.

JAMES H. NEWETT was born in Chicago and received his Ph.B. degree from the University of Chicago. In addition to " 'Limination," Mr. Newett has had published newspaper articles and verse. The past year he has prepared literary programs for various women's clubs in Texas. At present Mr. Newett is employed by the American National Red Cross at Dallas, Texas.

MARGARET ELIZABETH BOWEN states that "Crude and Unrefined" was based upon an actual experience. Mrs. Bowen's dramatic activities have been in connection with two very successful Little Theatres, the Tulsa and Wichita Falls organizations. Prior to her dramatic interests, Mrs. Bowen was for ten years a professional writer of travels in America and China.

MARJORIE GARNETT. The widespread interest in dramatic work is felt not only in adult organizations, but in junior groups as well. High school dramatic clubs are encouraging play producing and play writing. As a result of such interests comes the play "The Coward" from Marjorie Garnett. Miss Garnett is 14 years of age, a student in the Gainesville High School and "interested in becoming a writer." "The Coward" is her second work to be published, her first being a poem, "Clouds," in the *Dallas News*.

Who's Who

Jan Isbelle Fortune, daughter of Judge and Mrs. J. M. Isbelle. Born in Wellington, Texas, 1892. Graduate Wellington High School. Began writing at the age of nine. First printed work in *Dallas News* in 1909, a poem. Appeared in Snappy Stories in 1918, and included in Hilton Ross Greer's Voices of the Southwest. Began writing feature stories for *Dallas News* five years ago. Ran poems in feature section under contract for eighteen months. Winner of 1929 book award of the Poetry Society of Texas. "Black Poppies," put out by Southwest Press, is entry. Series of fifty-two plays on Texas History for Magnolia Petroleum Company are being broadcasted over Station WFAA. The plays included here come in that series. Mrs. Fortune is an authority on Texas History.

Tombs

By

MABLE RUTH STONG

Prize play in the State-wide Contest of the "Federation of Women's Club."

Price for production, $7.50. Write the Southwest Press, Publishers.

TOMBS

CHARACTERS:

MAGGIE COMBS—The grave-digger—is a medium-sized, sturdy woman of about fifty. Her mussy, worn, mannish, working clothes and her roughened calloused hands are direct contradiction to the resolute pride that looks out from a face that is crowned with a dirty stocking cap. About her mouth are traces of snuff. She moves with a heavy stiffened stride that denotes the result of hard labor on a powerful physique.

"OLD MAN" COMBS—Maggie's irresponsible husband. The "Old Man," although taller than Mag, is very stooped. His flowing white hair and stubby beard, together with his feeble movements, accentuates the frailty of old age. His clothing, though shabby, is neater far than Mag's. There is an air of flippant independence about him and it is easily seen from his easy going air that he is a mixture of irresponsibility and humor.

MRS. FREDERICK—A cultured, refined, young woman who possesses a beautiful understanding of people of all classes.

MR. WALLACE—A very arrogant, pompous man of about forty-five years.

MARTHIE—A radiant youngster of about four. She is dressed in a very sombre ill-fitting dress, but her golden mop of tousled hair makes her lovely in spite of it.

SETTING:

SCENE—A country graveyard in a coal-mining town. On left center is an unfinished grave; the remainder of the stage from center on back to upstage is filled with various other graves marked with various sized monuments, the majority of which are small and very plain. In the distance on a slight incline a weather-beaten bench leans under a lone leafless tree.

TIME—About five-thirty on an autumn afternoon. Sunset colors are just beginning to glow in the sky. The colors grow in intensity until the climax of the play at which time the sky darkens.

The old man and Mag are discovered working on an unfinished grave. Mag works quite methodically while her companion only digs spasmodically.

Old Man—She's chased me away from her old peach tree for the last time, he, he, he! (His shrill laughter is interspersed with sneezing.)

Mag—What'cha talkin' about?

Old Man—Ain't old lady Williams to be buried here tomorrow?

Mag—It's likely she will.

Old Man—Likely? Huh! She's dead, ain't she?

Mag—Not quite. They say she's purty low and I didn't figger she'd last long now. Thought we might as well get her grave out of the way. For there's bound to be a purty heavy rush on fur quite a while.

Old Man (Chuckles and slaps himself on the knee)—Why, Mag, it would be a joke on you if she didn't die!

Mag—It'll fit somebody else then, maybe old David Jessups; he can have it if he gets here first. I'd like to cover him up so he can't pester the pore folks over yonder.

Old Man—They say he's already picked out his casket and his layin' away suit.

Mag—He'd do better to pick out his prayers and start repentin'. The black scoundrel, the stingy old cheat—him a rollin' in gold, and he wouldn't give his wife no money to buy a tombstone for her pore old mother's grave! I tell you, he'd better be thinkin' about where he's goin' termorrow!

Old Man—Termorrow? Why, Mag! He can't go no wheres termorrow, he's most nigh all paralyzed, they say.

Mag—Aw, doncha know what I mean—the termorrow the tombstones be talkin' about.

Old Man—He, he, he (sneezes), they can't talk, Mag.

Mag—Don't be a nut—they have readin' on 'em, don't they?

Old Man (Laughs loudly and ends up by sneezing)—You can't read, Mag!

Mag—I can't, can't I? Mebbe, I can't (sarcastically), but ain't that oldest Peter's child showed me some of the verses on the tombstones? Ain't she learned me what they all say?

Old Man (Deferentially)—Wal, wal, Mag, I never heard that before, you allers wuz one to learn things.

Mag (Pleased but derisive)—Hump!

Old Man (Walks among the graves on right stage)—Now this one has a lot of this writin' on it; whut's it say?

Mag—A lie!

Old Man (Startled he sneezes)—W—w—whut?

Mag—A lie. Thet's Sister Peasley's grave and thet marker there says, "None knew her but to love her." She's the one thet put my dorgs in the pound.

Old Man—I reckon I wuz away when thet hap-

pened. (He continues to potter around among the stones, peering at the various ones.)

Mag—I reckon you wuz. (Putting down shovel and going over to center stage.) I like this one.

Old Man—It's a fancy one, ain't it? Must have cost a heap.

Mag—Reckon it did; Miss Marthie's buried under here. Remember she jest had one arm? (with pride). She uster ask me to come to church. Made me a dress one time—with embroidery on it!—Never wore it—it's too purty—never went to church either—not cause I didn't like Miss Marthie . . .

Old Man—Is this writin' same ez the other?

Mag (Shakes head negatively)—I like this 'un best of all the tombstones. It says, "She did unto others like she would have 'em do unto her." Now ain't that purty? "She did unto others as she would have 'em do unto her." You know I'd like that on my own tombstone.

Old Man (Impressed but wanting to appear jovial)—Wal, wal, Mag, I ain't much good on writin', but if I'm 'round I'll see whut I kin do fer you.

Mag (Returns to her digging)—Quit yer fussin'.

Old Man—Here (gesturing to Mag). This 'un ain't got much on it, atall.

Mag (Remains in the grave as she stares across stage at the marker)—It says, "He has risen."

Old Man—What? Thet don't sound right. Are you real sure you ain't mixed up on this 'un?

Mag—Sure.

Old Man—Whut's it mean then—"He has risen?"

Mag—It means that Deacon Jones—he's buried under there, he wuz sech a good man on this earth thet when he died and wuz buried under the ground there warn't nothin' not even the Devil could keep him down. He went to Heaven sure. He tried to keep them church wimmin' from pesterin' me about the youngun'.

(Enter Marthie from right stage. She jumps happily over various graves as she comes across stage to Mag. As she reaches impulsively to Mag she drops the ragged sweater she was carrying. As she stands playing with the shovel which Mag still retains; Mag fondles the child's hair lovingly.)

Old Man—You'll have somethin' like "He is risen" on your own tombstone, Mag. I don't know thet I ever mentioned it to you, but you have been a mighty good old woman all yer life (sneezes) you've allers treated me like a gentleman.

Mag—Yeah, when you're ever around!

Old Man—And takin' thet kid to look after, not everybody would have done thet. You've got your hands full a tendin' this here graveyard, an' she's been a lot of trouble. Mebbe it'd been best to have let them church wimmin' send her to thet Asylum!

Mag—Sssh! (looks warily at the child who has strayed over to a monument decorated with a tiny

marble lamb). She ain't the kind of a young'un to live in no asylum!

Old Man—Wal, I guess this place is a bit livelier than an Asylum. The young'un has been here a long time, about six years, ain't she?

Mag—Why, its four years tonight—it don't seem thet long. Seems just the other day when thet man buried her Maw right up there under thet tree. It was a queer burin'—the queerest I ever seen. She wuz sure a white corpse, the whitest I ever seen, an' her husband was almost as white. There weren't no mourners a tall and thet man din't sob or nothin'. I tell you it wuz still and queer. You know how you sorter feel that sumpin' is goin' ter happen? Wal, every time thet lightin' flashed, I jest felt it—I felt that sumpin' wuz goin' to happen. An' warn't I right? Jest as soon as I had filled in the grave thet queer man of hers picked up a bundle thet had been near him all the time an' says sorter hurried like—"Keep this 'till I come for it." He thought she'd be dead when I opened the bundle or she'd die soon enough, I reckon.

Old Man—Wal, wal, won't he be surprised some day?

Mag—What'cha mean?

Old Man (Sneezes)—When he comes back.

Mag (Fiercely)—He ain't comin' back!

Old Man—Why, when did he die, Mag?

Mag—He ain't dead—not that I knows of, but he

ain't comin' back! Ain't there a God who watches over this graveyard? Sure there is, an' don't he know how thet man left thet young'un? I know, I know he ain't comin' back! (Mag stands staring into space while the old man feebly walks over to the grave and begins unenthusiastically to dig. In a moment Mag seems as if she awakes to the realities and picks up her shovel and together they dig on in silence for a moment until the Old Man is seized with a coughing and sneezing spasm.)

Mag—Here you, you ain't had time to get toughened to this. Aire yer feet wet? Git up here and set a while. Tonight I'll mix up a bit of mentholatum an' turpentine with thet bacon-grease an' coal-oil an' rub it in on yer chest an' you'll be good as new te-morrow.

Old Man (Plaintively)—I ain't takin' nothin' cathin', am I, Mag?

Mag—I reckon as how you're not—thet influenza epidemic is sure fatal, they say, we buried the Bung's baby this mornin'. (She jerks hand back to a small unmarked grave which is left of center.)

Old Man—Whut if Marthie should take it?

Mag—I don't—I don't feel like she will. (She looks around for the child, sees the ragged sweater of the child's near the unfinished grave, picks it up and goes toward right stage looking for the child. She calls: Marthie! Marthie! (She gestures to child off extreme right) Marthie! (The child enters from right stage; Mag seats herself on a tombstone while

the child stands by her and plays with the small knob of wool on top of Mag's stocking-cap): Its gettin' cool, it is, an' little folks don't want to catch no cold! (She buttons the sweater on the child.) We ain't got no time to play doctor, no we ain't. (She feels the child's forehead.) You're alright, I reckon! You been swingin' up there on thet grape-vine, ain't cha? (Caresses child's hair gently). Wal, run on to yer swingin', and keep thet sweater on, and when I finish diggin' and it gits real dark, we'll have thet surprise! (Marthie gives Mag a childish embrace which Mag clumsily attempts to return. As the child runs happily off right stage Mag stands watching her.)

Old Man—What'cha mean surprise, Mag?

Mag—Its the young'un's birthday, ain't it? She's the kind of a young'un thet oughter have really birthdays . . . I never had none.

Old Man—Aire there goin' to be a cake?

Mag—I wish there wuz. There warn't nobody I could ask to bake me one. Now, I reckon if Miss Marthie had been alive, she'd a done it.

Old Man—Well what'cha—

Mag—I got her a box of Cracker-Jack and a box of Animal Crackers!

Old Man—Wal, wal, ain't thet fine!

Mag—An' the Animal Crackers 'll last a long time, too. (Going over near right of Miss Marthie's grave.) I didn't know where to put 'em to keep

her from findin' 'em, so I hid 'em under this bucket—

Old Man—Let's take a look, Mag.

(Enter Mrs. Frederick left stage. She comes in haltingly and at her first words Mag and the Old Man are startled.)

Mrs. Frederick—Am I speaking to Mrs. Maggie Combs?

Mag (Without moving)—Aire you one of them wimmin' to see about the asylum?

Mrs. Frederick—Why, no—I, its—

Mag (Putting down the bucket and striding over to her; sticks out hand after first wiping it on her trousers). I'm Mag, what'cha want?

Old Man (Comfortingly)—Be ye comin' to see after a grave?

Mag—If you want one in a hurry like. (Pointing to the unfinished grave.)

Mrs. Frederick—Oh, no, Mrs. Combs, it isn't that. I didn't come to see about a grave. I came—I came because I heard—that—

Mag (Laughs shortly)—I reckon I know now. You jest wanted ter see me. Some folks calls me a character.

Old Man—That's right, there ain't a stranger thet comes ter town fer any spell whut don't come out ter see Mag! He, he, he!

Mrs. Frederick—I suppose they come because it is

very unusual to find a woman who is brave enough to dig graves.

Mag—Why you don't have to be brave—you gotta be strong, thet's all—

Old Man—Mag's strong, she is!

Mag (Going back to work on the grave). You might as well set yourself down on thet marker, there. They are right easy to rest on.

Mrs. Frederick—Have you been doing this work very long, Mrs. Combs?

Mag—Nigh onto thirty years! An' I ain't found a man yet thet can dig a straighter and deeper grave than me.

Mrs. Frederick—I'm sure it must be a very difficult task as well as a very sad one.

Mag (Puzzled)—Why, it ain't sad! I'm allers glad to bury them folks that is wickid,—and them thet is good—why they is ready to die, so why be sad about thet?

Mrs. Frederick—But its so very sad to see and hear the mourners.

Mag—Mebbe, mebbe; but its enough to make you laugh sometimes, peers like its allers them thet's done the least thet howls the loudest. Now there's old Mose Andrews—he most nigh cried his eyes out when I buried his wife over yander, he even put "We shall meet again," on her tombstone, an' three days after thet he's married agin! (The Old Man

laughs shrilly at that! Mrs. F. appears ill at ease and tries to say something, but Mag seems to have found an outlet for her reminiscenses in the person of Mrs. F.). Its sorter hard to bury the little 'uns sometimes; them's thet are fat and happy, it don't seem right fer 'em to be laid away so soon; but the skinny, scrawny young'uns—them thet ain't treated right by their maws and paws—I guess its better fer 'em. Thet grave over there—(Points to small grave). Thet's the Bung's baby thet wuz buried this mornin'. Now I reckon its a good thing thet the influenzie took him off, his paw can't make enough to feed the six others thet's left an' he beats 'em when he's drunk.

Mrs. Frederick (Shuddering)—Is this epidemic that you speak of so very serious?

Mag—I figger its bad enough. The teacher up yander had to shet down school cause there weren't enough young'uns left to recite.

Mrs. Frederick (Rising from the tombstone)—Are any of your family ill?

Old Man—I wuz jest tellin' Mag when you come in thet I wuz afraid I might be catchin' sumpin'—

Mag—Aw, the the Old Man is allers ailin', but Marthie an' me, we are allers pretty fit.

Mrs. Frederick—You have children?

Mag—Yes'um, I got a young'un!

Mrs. Frederick—Mrs. Com—

Mag (Putting down shovel and climbing out of

the grave)—An' you oughter see her—she's smarter'n a whip. I'm goin' ter send her to school to larn her letters. She'll have ter walk quite a fer piece, but she's goin' ter be larned.

Mrs. Frederick—And you—you—want her to go to school?

Mag—You went to school didn't you? Ain'cha glad you went? Thought so. Miss Marthie went ter school, too, Marthie's named fer her. I want Marthie ter be jest like her—she wuz a lady. The young'un's birthday is ter night. We're gonna have a kind of party—me an' her an' the Old Man.

Old Man—Yes, we sure are! Why Mag—

(Enter Mr. Wallace. He has an arrogant confident air and appears to actually look down on everyone he speaks to. He nods as courteously as he is able to Mrs. F., leans indolently against Miss Marthie's tombstone while he calmly looks about and stares at Mag and the Old Man with undisguised curiosity.)

Mr. Wallace—Well, I see you found her alright. (Walking over to Mag and speaking with an affectedly polite air.) And this is the Mrs. Marguerite Combs I have heard so much of? (Mag immediately on the defensive gives him a half contemptuous look and continues to dig.)

Old Man—Thet's Mag, alright (sneezes pitifully.) Be ye comin' fer a grave fer some corpse? (Mag stops a moment to listen for an answer.)

Mr. Wallace (Cynically)—A grave for a corpse? Well, I hadn't planned on this little interlude. Let me see just what style graves have you in stock today? (He goes over closer to the Old Man and looks critically at the unfinished grave. Mag has put down her spade and moved a trifle back where she pulls at clumps of weeds growing near the graves and continues to inspect Mr. W.). This one is very nice, but I should prefer one a little less Victorian. A shade more pictorial.

Old Man—Don't reckon you kin dig them kinds, kin you Mag?

Mag (Coming down stage by Mr. W. with an air of decision)—Aire you wantin' a grave or not?

Mr. Wallace (Sensing Mag's antagonism)—Well, no! On second thought, its growing so late I shall have to postpone my selection. Another day, perhaps, Mrs. Combs.

Mag—Folks don't come out here to make light of buryin'.

Mr. Wallace—No? Well then, you must excuse my extreme ignorance of graveyard etiquette. (Turns laughingly to Mrs. F.). I really shall have to be coached.

Mrs. Frederick (Kindly)—Really, Mr. Wallace, I can hardly see the necessity for such flippant trivialities.

Mr. Wallace (Drawing himself up an inch higher and laughing indulgently)—Dear dear, I seem to

be drawing reproaches down upon my poor gray head. I was presuming that after such an ordeal as you anticipated a little er—a—light conversation would be needed to calm the turbulent waters.

Mrs. Frederick—I have not had time to even mention the matter.

Mr. Wallace—Not had time? Oho, I see (looking at watch.) You are getting sentimental.

Mrs. Frederick—I can easily see now that it is a problem that deserves the very highest type of sentiment.

Mr. Wallace—So? Very well, but it is growing late and you realize that it is impossible to spend the night in this hole? (Mrs. F. nods). I shall manage then, so we can be getting away from here.

Mrs. Frederick (Starting towards Mrs. Combs.) Mr. Wallace, I prefer to—

Mr. Wallace (Unmindful of Mrs. F.). Mrs. Combs, (Mag looks at him steadily, still on the defensive) do you have a small child around here—a girl—you have been keeping?

Mag (Stiffens with a start)—Yes.

Old Man—Be ye speaking of Marthie?

Mag (Jerks head toward the Old Man indicating that he is to be still and steadily looks at Mr. W. watching for his next move.)

Mr. Wallace—You have had the child about four years now, haven't you?

Mag—I reckon you know that well enough.

Mr. Wallace—And while you've taken care of the child to the best of your ability during these four years, it has surely occurred to you, Mrs. Combs, that there might be someone who could care for the child in a more suitable manner.

Mag—I ain't goin' ter give her up to no asylum.

Mr. Wallace—Come, come.

Mag—She ain't the kind of a young'un to live in no asylum, I tell yer. She wouldn't be happy there; why I've had her all her life—I've done all she's ever had done fer her, then ain't I her maw? No! I tell yer, she ain't goin' to no asylum.

Mr. Wallace—Mrs. Combs, if you would be so kind as to stop all this chattering and listen to me. I might have an opportunity to explain that I have nothing to do with the asylum you speak of. (Mag still on her guard is much relieved.) You can remember quite well the night the child's mother was buried here—

Old Man (Extremely anxious to talk)—It wuz four years ago, ternight, it—

Mr. Wallace (Ignoring the Old Man)—You also remember quite well the man who left the child that night. Well, see if you understand this,—that man, the father of the child you have been keeping, is the brother of this lady. Well? (impatiently.) Must I be even plainer? Mrs. Combs, she is the aunt of this child.

Mag—Well?

Mr. Wallace—Evidently you know now why we are here.

Mag—I ain't goin' ter let you have nothin' ter do with Marthie.

Mr. Wallace—Be careful, Mrs. Combs, that is a statement you have no legal right to make.—The law—

Mag—Whut's the law got ter do with me an' Marthie? Whut's it ever done? The law didn't do nothin' about punishin' thet man thet run off and left the young'un, did it? The law didn't do nothin' about supportin' the young'un, did it? All that the law would do when I wuz a needin' help wuz try to muddle things up by trying ter send the young'un off to an Asylum! Don'cha say law ter me.

Old Man—You'd better be takin' yourself off, you had! Mag is strong, she is!

Mr. Wallace—That's enough old fellow, you keep out of this! See? It is by the law that we must be governed, Mrs. Combs.

Mag—Alright, I'm governed as you calls it by a law. Its the law on these tombstones. Thet there law you speak of ain't got nothin' ter say ter me. You see that there tombstone? See thet writin'? It says "She did unto others as she would have 'em do unto her." Thet's the law I tries ter follow. I been good to Marthie, treated her right, like I wisht I'd been treated when I wuz a young'un. Thet's why I ain't goin' ter let her be put in no asylum.

Thet's why (deliberately) I ain't goin' to let you have nothin' ter do with Marthie!

Mr. Wallace—It doesn't matter whether you desire to follow the law I speak of or not, Mrs. Combs, but it does matter that I have authority to make you do it! You have no legal claim on the child at all; you are not even a relative—

Mag—I've done all thet's ever been fer the young'un.

Mr. Wallace—Oh very well, but let's try to be reasonable enough to understand that regardless of your generosity the law always gives first consideration to the relatives.

Mag—No matter whut they've done, no matter whut they are? (Angrily). Take yer old lyin' and schemin' law and get out of here, do you hear? Get out! Yer tryin' ter pull the same law on me thet thet scoundrel of a liar did to Widow Jones,—turned her and her baby out of the house right after Jones wuz buried out here, jest 'cause the law said it wuz right! Git out, I tell yuh!

Mr. Wallace—Perhaps you've heard of such a thing as a jail? You might enjoy staying a while there until you get over your present attitude toward the law?

Mag—They don't put folks in jail fer being kind to little kids.

Mr. Wallace—If you are so determined to claim the child—just where are your papers?

Mag (Puzzled)—Whut papers?

Mr. Wallace—The legal papers that give you the right to say the child is yours.

Mag—I—I—I don't have none.

Mr. Wallace (Laughs shortly)—Well?

Mag—Where—are—your papers?

Mr. Wallace—Er—a—er enough of this ignorant chatter.

Mag—I may be ignorant but I know whut's right.

Mr. Wallace—Then if you are so extremely ethical, call the child, we must be getting out of here. (Mag does not respond.) Well? Well? What in the world do you want with a child here in this God forsaken graveyard—keep her here so that she can work for you some day—dig graves?

(Mag stands as if stunned; Mrs. F. seems to be deeply moved by the last statement and comes resolutely over to Mr. W.).

Mrs. Frederick—I think this has gone far enough, and if you will be so considerate as to wait out there I shall try to make amends for some of the things you have said.

Mr. Wallace (Blusteringly)—You don't know what an obstinate class this is—

Mrs. Frederick (Motioning for him to leave)—That will do please.

Mr. Wallace—You will need me before this is over!

Mrs. Frederick (Going over to Mag stands by the grave)—I am sorry, so sorry that such hard things have been said. I should have told you at first; but there are things yet that have not been explained, won't you listen to me please?

Mag (Angrily)—I'd rather see the child go to the asylum than fer him to take the young'un. Nobody's goin' ter take her! She's mine! I tell yer!

Old Man—Mag, Mag, you wanna be risen, don'cha? Mebbe you'd do better to let 'em take the young'un!

Mag (Pleadingly)—Doncha know I don't want her to dig graves? I wouldn't let her do that. Its alright fer me, but she's different—I allers wanted a young'un—that's all—not—to—dig graves.

Mrs. Frederick—I know that. You want her to have all the nice things in life that you have never had an opportunity to have, (softly). That is part of your law in this graveyard, isn't it?

Mag—Thet's whut I wuz thinkin' of—Marthie—she's named fer Miss Marthie thet there law is on the tombstone fer—she'll be like Miss Marthie when she grows up.

Mrs. Frederick—And don't you think, Mrs. Combs, that if I tried very hard and obeyed the law—your law, I might help Martha to be the kind of a Miss Martha you know?

Mag (Startled)—You? Mebbe you could, but I ain't goin' ter let thet man have nothin' ter do with her . . . He's your man, ain't he?

Mrs. Frederick—He is my lawyer.

Mag—He ain't your man?

Mrs. Frederick—My husband is dead.

Mag—What'cha bringin' thet lawyer here for? Don'cha know thet I kin do right, I kin mind my own business without one of 'em tryin' ter boss me? (Turns her face away from Mrs. F.).

Mrs. Frederick—Mrs. Combs, I know that you do not need anyone to make you obey the law, I know that the only law you have in your heart is stronger far than all the laws in the law books. (Mag still keeps her face turned away). Mrs. Combs, look at me please! (Still Mag averts her face). Martha's father is my brother.

Mag (Laughs bitterly)—The young'un's paw? I've never prayed much, but ever since thet night I've prayed that he wouldn't come back. Thought God answered prayers. (Laughs again).

Mrs. Frederick—He won't come back—he is dead. (Mag with a start looks at Mrs. F.).

Mrs. Frederick—I had not seen him for six years; he did not always obey the law—your law, until last week when he was—dying—he called me to tell about Martha and asked that I bring her up as my own child. He knew that I, like you, Mrs. Combs, have always wanted a young one. Oh, I

know it is hard, but can't you understand? Don't you see how very much I want Martha? My own brother's child?

Mag—Its hard (she gets up heavily from the mound of dirt). I reckon it is hard, you wantin' Marthie when I want her too. You wouldn't take her away from me when she thinks I'm her maw, would you?

Mrs. Frederick—Mrs. Combs you said it was hard—hard that we both want Martha. It is—(brokenly) when I came here this evening I did not expect to find—you wanting Martha—wanting a young one and loving her, too. I see now, that it is not for me to say which one of us should have her. I shall not take her without your consent. Martha is yours now—and her future is in your hands. Forget everything that the lawyer said, and just remember that you think Martha will be better off here—why I will go away and never come back again. But remember, Mrs. Combs, that I, too, will be good to Martha—remember that I can love, too.

Mag—Well, you're being square about Marthie, alright, alright. An' you mean thet if I want to keep Marthie you'll leave me alone, an' thet lawyer he won't come back again? You know I want her! Why since I've had Marthie I wouldn't know how to get along without her. Of course, I want to keep her! She's my young'un! (Mrs. F. half turns as if to leave as Mag goes and stands by Miss Martha's grave). I've allers wanted Marthie ter be like

her,—mebbe it would be treatin' her squarer ter give her a chanct. This graveyard—its alright fer me, but she's different. She needs ter know her letters, sing in the choir at meetin' an' wear embroidered dresses. I don't want her to dig graves—you know thet? Its alright fer me—but she's so young, an' (resolutely) I'd rather you'd take her now. Then I won't have ter think about her goin'. Yes, I want Marthie! But I'm not goin' ter keep her. (She starts away but turns). Its her birthday ternight—you'll have her a cake an' candles, mebbe? (Mrs. F. nods). (Mag goes to the hiding place and draws out the surprise.) I wuz figgerin' on usin' this at our party. Don't have no use fer 'em now. Marthie'll be tickled with 'em. You take 'em, won't yer? (She goes to right stage and calls.) Marthie!—Marthie! (The child runs in and Mag takes her by the hand and leads her over to Mrs. F.).

Mrs. Frederick—And this is Martha? (She stoops to the child, holds out her arms pleadingly. Martha comes closer as though irresistibly drawn to Mrs. F. She seems quite overcome by awe and curiosity. She fingers Mrs. F.'s dress and childishly pats her cheek.)

Mag—Marthie! (The child comes over to Mag who stoops awkwardly and puts her arm around the child.) Remember thet surprise we wuz goin' ter have ternight? Well, yer a goin' ter get it alright, an' its a lot bigger surprise than I thought it'd be. See thet lady? Well, she's gonna take you to thet surprise an' Marthie, you'll get ter go ridin' in—(Mag looks appealing at Mrs. F.).

Mrs. Frederick—In a car.

Mag—Yes, in a car, Marthie! Jest think you'll get ter ride in a great fine car, mebbe as big and shiny as the hearse! Now won't that be nice? (The child gives Mag an ecstatic hug; Mag gets up heavily, her face drawn and tired). You'll mebbe stay a while with the lady, Marthie, 'cause there's gonna be lots of surprises—so many that you'll have ter stay awhile ter find out whut'll they be like. (Mag leads the child over to Mrs. F. and speaks to her.) An' you'll remember about Miss Marthie? You won't forget her?

Mrs. Frederick (Brokenly, and taking hold of Mag's arm.) Mrs. Combs! You brave, brave woman! You said you never prayed much,—but won't you pray a little for me? Pray that I may be like Miss Martha—and like you! (Mrs. F. walks hurriedly off stage with the child but just as they reach the unfinished grave Martha impulsively runs back to Mag and gives her a last embrace.)

The Old Man curiously follows and stands peering after them. The sunset colors in the sky have gradually faded until only the darkening clouds can now be seen. Mag stands brokenly staring for a last glimpse of Martha, and as the Old Man sympathetically totters over and sits down on the small marker near the unfinished grave and lights his pipe, Mag methodically walks over to the grave and renews the digging as the curtain falls.

The Inspiration

By

BILLIE ONEAL

Prize play in One-act Play Contest held in Wichita Falls, Texas.

INSPIRATION

CHARACTERS: Mrs. McCormack, an Irish woman; Gertrude Brown a struggling artist; Ethel, her younger sister; Mrs. Van Alystine.

TIME: Late afternoon of a spring day.

PLACE: Living room, bed room and studio combined of a small New York apartment. The stage is dim when the curtain rises, made so by the scarcity of windows and light in the apartment. The room gives evidence that Gertrude, a person of artistic temperament, has, with small means, made the best of her living surroundings. A bit of cretonne here, a soft lamp there, has turned what would otherwise have been a bare, desolate room into one of cozy comfort. At the rise of the curtain, Ethel, a young girl, is busily engaged in putting the room in order, pausing once to look at a half finished painting mounted on an easel in an adjoining room. The painting is not placed so that the audience can see it. She shakes her head as she looks at it and returns to her work with a perplexed look on her face. Outside the door is heard the angry loud tones of Mrs. McCormack.

(Outside)

Mrs. McCormack—Begittin' out of here, ye little brats, and leave me Pat alone. I'll be calling the janitor and then ye'll clear out.

Ethel (Listening)—Mrs. McCormack running the children out of the hallway again. I wonder if she can be coming in here.

Mrs. McCormack (Opening the door, calling loudly)—Are ye at home? I thought I seen ye go down the street as I was hanging me wet clothes on the fire escape.

Ethel—It was Gertrude, I guess. She left a short while ago.

Mrs. McCormack (Comes farther in the room, drying hands on her apron and wiping eyes)—So it was. When I came in I couldn't tell whither 'twas ye or ye sister Gertrude, 'twas so dark in here. My! but these apartments do git dark early in the afternoon, don't they? (dusts chair.) It's a shame the hall has all the afternoon sun and we git none. Bits of health going to waste, I thinks to me self when I see the bright sunlight filling the hall.

Ethel (Turning on lights)—I thought I heard you in the hallway.

Mrs. McCormack—Yis, me little Pat was beggin't to sit by the hall winder, so that he might see the sun go behind the tall buildings. The minit its gone he cries "Mither, Mither, the sun's gone to sleep." And its me that's willing to let him think it sleeps.

Ethel—Poor little fellow! Is he any better?

Mrs. McCormack (Shakes head)—No. How me heart does ache for the lad.

Ethel—What was the doctors last report about Pat?

Mrs. McCormack (Who has been assisting Ethel, now taking her seat)—He says the air and sunshine would be makin' him well.

Ethel—Air and sunshine? There's plenty of air and sunshine, Mrs. McCormack. The world is full of it.

Mrs. McCormack—But what can I do? It has taken all of the money since the lad was hurt to pay the Doctor. And then me man was laid off three months because of the strike. There's no money. 'Tis the sorrow of me life to see Pat wastin' away, beggin' to be carried out among the trees and me able to do nothin'. (wiping eyes). The Doctor says the warm sunshine might cure his aching bones.

Ethel—Poor little Pat! (Goes to window). Spring is here and everywhere there is life and sunshine. Certainly it is the time to be happy. God never meant for any of us to be otherwise (sighs).

Mrs. McCormack—Not even ye look happy today. Ye who always sing and smile. It's many a smile ye has brought me when me heart was heavy (waits and watches her). It's busy ye seems as usual.

Ethel—Yes, we have been busy.

Mrs. McCormack—Some people always have important things to be doin'. And I don't niver seem to have nothin' more important than a few groceries to buy and Pat and me ither children to see after. I wuzn't meant to be of much importance anyway.

Ethel—Don't say that, Mrs. McCormack.

Mrs. McCormack—Has Mrs. Gertrude sold that painting of her's yet? What's it called—the one she has down at the studio?

Ethel—It's called "Childhood."

Mrs. McCormack—"Childhood" that's the one. Names somehow don't niver stay with me.

Ethel—No, she hasn't sold it yet.

Mrs. McCormack—No, ye say? Sure, it must be hard on ye and most of all on Mrs. Gertrude with the livelihood of ye both dependent on her efforts.

Ethel—She sometimes says it is.

Mrs. McCormack—'Twould be a pity for ye to have to move from this apartment after ye have made things so cozy—but poor as it is there's some what's cheaper. And when ye money is gone, it most likely stays gone.

Ethel—It is true we haven't much left to live on. I don't know what we shall do if Gertrude doesn't sell her painting soon. Each day she calls the studio and it's always the same answer.

Mrs. McCormack—Ye do say?

Ethel—Mrs. McCormack, (Ethel hesitates as if undecided) I feel that I must tell you about the the other.

Mrs. McCormack—(Immediately getting interested when she thinks there is something new for her to learn)—What ither? Go on, child, I always did like to know all there wuz to know. (Moving forward to the edge of her chair).

Ethel—Well, you see, it is this way. Gertrude would never forgive me if she knew I had told you. She says you couldn't understand, that only educated can—

Mrs. McCormack—Well maybe so, maybe so, but anyway ye go ahead and tell me, child. 'Twill be makin' ye feel better.

Ethel—Gertrude has been working for months on another painting—one she hopes to enter in a big contest.

Mrs. McCormack—Do tell!

Ethel—If she can only win this it will be everything to us—money—success. It will mean that we can have the things we need and want. I know she can win it if—

Mrs. McCormack—Go on child, don't keep me waiting.

Ethel—If—if—Oh, Mrs. McCormack, you must never let her know I told you. She scolds me for confiding in you because she says you can't understand.

Mrs. McCormack—Go on child, sure it's listening I am.

Ethel—If she can only get an inspiration she can quickly do the work. She seems to be terribly worried—more worried than anytime since her sorrow. Sometimes she will work for days and I will think she is getting what she wants, then with one stroke of the brush she will ruin it all, throw her brushes down suddenly, put on her hat and be gone for hours.

Mrs. McCormack (Emphatically)—That's me way of doin' things, too. If they don't suit me I tear them up and start all over again.

Ethel—Do you?

Mrs. McCormack—Now when I made Mary's last dress, I had it ready for the hem. It didn't look right so I ripped it up and did it all over again.

Ethel—I can't see anything wrong with what she does. It all seems wonderful to me but there is something about it that doesn't please her.

Mrs. McCormack—Yis, I understand.

Ethel—For some reason she doesn't seem to have hit on the right idea. I hear her saying over to herself: "If I should just get an inspiration—a big human idea."

Mrs. McCormack—Tis helping her would be meself if I could get the idea. Now there's some things

I don't have to look at more than once to see what is needed.

Ethel—You can tell for yourself how disappointed she was today (they go to the door and stand looking in at painting in the other room). There is the work of a week, ruined in a few minutes.

Mrs. McCormack (Turning head first one way and then another)—Well that has the best of me. What can be the matter of it is more than I can tell.

Ethel—That is what I say.

(Gertrude enters unobserved and stands looking at the pair).

Mrs. McCormack—Andrew Flannigan worked half a day on me sink tryin' to find the leak and I jist walked up to it, gave it one look and told him what the trouble wuz. But this has me bested. It's helping her would be me self it—

Ethel—The critics who have seen it have made very flattering reports.

Mrs. McCormack—That woman she has painted does look queer in the face, but that ain't more than lots of people do. If she would—

(Mrs. McCormack extends her arm and is in the act of touching the painting when Gertrude interrupts).

Gertrude—Stop! Don't touch that.

(Ethel and Mrs. McCormack turn in amazement).

Mrs. McCormack—Faith, and it was only her eyes I wuz going to touch. They look like burnt coals that had lost their fire.

Gertrude (Turning on her in fury)—Who are you that you should criticise? What do you know?

Mrs. McCormack—It's truth ye tell. I was jist saying to Miss Ethel, that I wasn't meant to be of much importance. It's all too high up fer me. Me head ain't of use for anything ither than washin', ironin' and sich loike.

Ethel (Turns to Mrs. McCormack)—You have helped me a lot, Mrs. McCormack. I had to tell someone.

Mrs. McCormack—There, there, I know. Faith I must be seeing about me lad. (Exits).

Gertrude (Advancing)—Why do we always have to be harrassed by such as she? It is impossible for people who live on such a low plane to understand that they should keep within their own sphere and not try to mix with those living in the idealistic world. How I have fought living in these cheap quarters because of just such as she.

Ethel—She stopped in for just a few minutes.

Gertrude—I suppose she inquired into all of our affairs.

Ethel—No, she didn't.

Gertrude—She probably wanted to know just how much longer we were going to remain here—

whether we had paid our rent and whether we got that cretonne at sixty-nine cents a yard at the sale.

Ethel (Taking Gertrude's hat)—Gertrude, I think you do Mrs. McCormack an injustice. She has an inquiring mind but she is friendly.

Gertrude—I have nothing in common with people like that. I don't want them around me. They bore me—they irritate me. (Throwing her gloves down).

Ethel—A cup of tea will make you feel refreshed. (Goes about preparing tea. A short silence here.)

Gertrude—I have just returned from the studio.

Ethel (Eagerly)—Any favorable news?

Gertrude—None, Ethel, it seems we have fought a losing fight.

Ethel—Oh, Gertrude!

Gertrude—Mr. Blake said that every one admired the painting. That the subject I had given it—"Childhood" made it interesting to most people. He didn't encourage me much, though. He said it was mighty hard for an unknown artist to make a sale.

Ethel—Is there nothing we can do?

Gertrude.—I have held on hoping to win the National Prize with this other painting on which I am working, but things do not look very hopeful now. I seem to be devoid of any inspiration whatsoever. Every attempt I have made has been a

complete failure. (Walks over to door and looks in at the painting.) No one realizes it more than I.

Ethel—But Gertrude, what is that something you are looking for? What you have done seems all right to me.

Gertrude—If I could tell you, child, I could put it there.

Ethel—Yes, I guess so.

Gertrude (Worried)—I have walked the streets searching human faces that could give to me a big idea worthy of being transplanted to canvas. I am like one groping in the dark for a ray of light. Only a short time remains before the contest closes. (Slowly). I guess I shall fail.

Ethel—I am not going to give up hope.

Gertrude—Ethel, you don't understand. We can't remain here any longer. Our rent is unpaid. I have made an effort to keep this apartment, poor as it is, believing that the signs of some prosperity would attract real prosperity. I had to leave those other miserable quarters. For more than a year now we have moved from one squalid place to another. Each one was haunting in its poverty. Each one brought back thoughts I was trying to forget. (Gertrude puts her hands as if trying to blot out a memory).

Ethel—Don't recall all that. Mrs. McCormack was just remarking how attractive we have made everything.

Gertrude—Another theory of mine exploded. The time I have spent in creating this atmosphere has been wasted. I believed that making this place as attractive as possible would help us. Besides being livable, it would create the idea that I had known a little of success. (Telephone rings).

Eahel (Answering)—Hello—Yes. Mrs. Brown's apartment. Yes, Gertrude Brown. What is the name? Mrs. Van Alystine. (At the name Gertrude sits upright.) Yes. Come right up.

Gertrude (Excited)—What did she want, Ethel?

Ethel—She didn't say. She asked if you were in; she said that she had some important business with you.

Gertrude (Excitedly)—Mrs. Henry Bacon Van Alystine. (Ethel nods.) Ethel, she is the Mrs. Van Alystine who has that famous art collection. What do you suppose she wants to see me about?

Ethel—I wonder why should she be coming here?

Gertrude—Can it be possible that she is going to buy the painting?

*Ethe*l (Excitedly clapping her hands)—I know that is it. I know that is why she is coming.

Gertrude—Get those things out of sight. (Pointing to utensils Ethel has been using in making tea). After all the efforts we have spent in making this room presentable it would be shameful not to have it looking its best when our first customer arrives. Hurry, Ethel, hurry.

Ethel—But your tea is just ready. What a pity!

Gertrude—Throw it out the window—anything. We can't let her see that we eat, sleep and live in this one room.

Ethel (Overjoyed at a new idea)—Where is a cap? Let me be the maid. She need never know. She will be more impressed than ever that you are successful when she sees that you are able to keep a maid. (Takes cap and small apron from drawer). Then I won't have to throw out the tea.

Gertrude (An idea occurring to her)—Could it be that Mrs. Van Alystine has the wrong place? Did she ask if it was Mrs. Brown or Gertrude Brown? She could have been mistaken.

Ethel—She said Gertrude Brown.

Gertrude—I guess there is no mistake. I am the one for whom she is looking. (Eying the room with evident pleasure). I am glad that everything looks so cozy. I feel repaid for my work on this dingy place. (Looking at Ethel who by this time has on her cap and apron).

Ethel—With a maid, too.

(A knock on the door. There is a final hurrying about with Gertrude giving directions.)

Gertrude—I will sit over here. You admit Mrs. Van Alystine. (Ethel opens the door. Enters Mrs. Van Alystine. She is handsomely dressed. Gertrude rises as she enters and advances to meet her.)

Gertrude—Mrs. Van Alystine, I presume.

Mrs. Van Alystine—Gertrude Brown. Is it Miss Brown or Mrs. Brown?

Gertrude—Mrs. Brown if you use the prefix. I prefer just Gertrude Brown. Will you be seated.

Mrs. Van Alystine—Thanks.

Gertrude—I was just having tea served. Will you enjoy it with me?

Mrs. Van Alystine—Delighted.

Gertrude (To Ethel)—You may serve the tea. (Ethel shows signs of nervousness).

Mrs. Van Alystine—You probably know, Mrs. Brown, that I am a great lover and admirer of art. (Ethel nearly upsets cup she is passing to Mrs. Van Alystine. Spills some tea on Mrs. Van Alystine's arm).

Gertrude—I believe you possess one of the finest collections in the city, do you not?

Mrs. Van Alystine—You have heard of it? Collecting my art treasures has been a source of pleasure to me. I frequent all the studios.

Gertrude—Yes. (Attitude that of anxiously awaiting something to happen.)

Mrs. Van Alystine—Among the recent paintings I have found none that interested me more than "Childhood" of yours. (Ethel drops spoon, Mrs. Van Alystine looks at her through her lorgnette.)

Gertrude—That pleases me.

Mrs. Van Alystine—What could have been the inspiration for so touching a painting?

Gertrude—Are you interested in that?

Mrs. Van Alystine—You in some way had been very near to children.

Gertrude (Eagerly)—How have you guessed?

Mrs. Van Alystine—I have found in following up the history of my paintings that the artists must first have lived—must first have known within their own hearts what they put on canvas. We cannot give to others what we ourselves do not know.

Gertrude—There has been much in my life to cause me to love and appreciate the traits of childhood.

Mrs. Van Alystine (Sympathetically)—Tell me about it.

Gertrude—Perhaps the association with my sister—I have had the sole care of her since my mother's death. Nothing inspired the painting of "Childhood" more than a scene I used to witness as I went about a certain quarter of the city.

Mrs. Van Alystine—I felt there must be some particular experience. (Ethel exits. Mrs. Van Alystine's eyes follow her until she is out of the room). Isn't it pathetic the incompetent maids we have to endure now?

Gertrude—Indeed it is.

Mrs. Van Alystine—Do you mind telling me just

what your experience was? This is the part I enjoy in my collections—tracing if I can the motive for the painting.

Gertrude—It is a pleasure to find one so interested.

Mrs. Van Alystine—I am always interested in that phase. I call it my artist's complex.

Gertrude—My search—for it was a search—took me about the crowded tenement districts. There I looked on a picture that made my heart ache. Pale, undernourished children crowded together in the streets seeking a little sunlight, a little fresh air. You yourself have seen it—entire streets roped off by order of the Mayor to give them a place in which to play. As I used to pass along, I studied the expression on their faces. Denied the abundance of air, the wealth of sunshine which is the inalienable right of every living creature, they must seek their play in a crowded, smoky street. My heart rebelled against it that they through no choice of their own must endure it. Possibly it was my own dislike for dark places and a craving for light, air and sunshine that made me feel their lack of it so keenly.

Mrs. Van Alystine—When I came I was not certain whether you would understand—

Gertrude (Leaning forward as if wanting to go on). Our interest in art should cause us to understand each other.

Mrs. Van Alystine—It pleases me to hear you say

that. Having much in common we shall not be long in coming to an agreement.

Gertrude (A surety of the sale showing her tone and answer.) No.

Mrs. Van Alystine—I inquired at the studio as to who is the artist of "Childhood". They gave me your name and address. It was with hesitancy that I came here, feeling that you might not be in a position to grant my request.

Gertrude—Did you?

Mrs. Van Alystine—We so often find our artists who have not arrived in some disagreeable attic. But the moment I entered the comfort of your surroundings quieted my fears. I am glad you are able to have comforts and a maid, Mrs. Brown.

Gertrude—Comforts make life more bearable.

Mrs. Van Alystine—My greatest interest—even greater than that of art—lies in a hospital and summer camp we maintain for undernourished, sickly children.

Gertrude—I did not know that you had that interest.

Mrs. Van Alystine—It's the underlying motive that directs my whole life.

Gertrude—A worthy interest it is.

Mrs. Van Alystine—You say that you recognized in the little drawn faces that you saw the thoughts that underlie the painting "Childhood" . . . I came

to have my interest in the summer camps from a little life—an infant.

Gertrude (Interested)—Your own?

Mrs. Van Alystine—My own if love and thoughts could make her my own. But she belongs to another if flesh and blood made her so.

Gertrude—Adopted?

Mrs. Van Alystine—She would have been, had she been allowed to live. I found her, a sickly frail infant in a summer camp . . . undernourished, the little body a mere shadow of what had been intended. My indignation was aroused when I saw her to think that any infant should be so neglected.

Gertrude—The attendants neglected her?

Mrs. Van Alystine—No, their attention was all that could be asked. I was indignant because they had not taken the child sooner.

Gertrude—And why hadn't they?

Mrs. Van Alystine—Lack of funds . . . No place. While they waited for room to be made in the camp, the infant was wasting away in a squalid tenement.

Gertrude—The mother, could she not help?

Mrs. Van Alystine—She, how could she? She was too sick to raise her head.

Gertrude—The father. Where was he?

Mrs. Van Alystine—Killed in France. (Gertrude starts) before the baby ever saw the light of day. You know the story . . . A war bride, the young

husband was rushed away, the young mother stranded in New York without funds.

Gertrude (Looking away from Mrs. Van Alystine)—Did you ever see her?

Mrs. Van Alystine—No. The child was taken from her by the city authorities when she was in a delirious state. They brought the baby to the camp . . . the good, pure air saved her.

Gertrude (Eagerly)—The baby lived, you say?

Mrs. Van Alystine—For four months after I took her from the camp. I claimed her for my own.

Gertrude—For your own?

Mrs. Van Alystine—Those were my intentions if the mother would consent.

Gertrude—And she . . . consented?

Mrs. Van Alystine—I never found her. It was some weeks before the baby was well enough for me to make a search. In the meantime the mother had been moved to a hospital, had recovered . . . and was gone. The camp authorities had even lost her name.

Gertrude—The baby—did she miss her mother (eagerness is shown in Gertrude's voice) . . .did she cry for her?

Mrs. Van Alystine—At first, yes. (Gertrude turns away to hide her emotion). Had she lived she would never have known that I was not her mother.

Gertrude—And now—you wanted it that way?

Mrs. Van Alystine—Yes. I was glad I never found the mother. Since I have never seen her she is not real to me. The memory I have left to me is that the baby was mine.

Gertrude (Almost overcome but making a supreme effort to control herself). What . . . has the real mother left to her?

Mrs. Van Alystine—The same memory I have . . . that the baby was hers.

Gertrude—You think then that the mother, the real mother, I mean, should share that memory with another.

Mrs. Van Alystine—Why not? We have never met—I hope we never shall. We can both go through life carrying the same sweet memory.

Gertrude—Perhaps you are right (meditatively) . . . Perhaps.

Mrs. Van Alystine—Here is a picture of the baby after I had her three months. You can see for yourself how fat and fine she was.

Gertrude (Seizing the offered photograph)— Oh . . . .oh. (Gertrude gives way for a moment and then makes a supreme effort to control herself.) You must not notice me. It's the love I feel for children that gets the best of me. Beautiful baby . . . beautiful baby.

Mrs. Van Alystine—If you didn't know that feeling you could never paint the picture you have. That brings me to the purpose of my visit here.

You can now understand why I have become so interested in summer camps as health centers for needy children.

Gertrude (With a supreme effort laying the photograph on the table)—Yes . . . I can understand.

Mrs. Van Alystine—We are now making a campaign to maintain a hospital and summer camp for the underprivileged children. You can appreciate the need of this.

Gertrude—After what you have told me, I can.

Mrs. Van Alystine—We wanted your picture "Childhood" to award to the division securing the most funds. Will you *donate* it?

(Exclamation of smothered surprise and noise of chair upsetting in the room where Ethel had disappeared. Mrs. Van Alystine looks toward door). It is such a worthy cause and the picture so suitable.

Gertrude—This is sudden. You must give me time to think. (She struggles for her composure).

Mrs. Van Alystine—Just take all the time you want. We never expect an answer immediately. (There is a pause during which time Mrs. Van Alystine examines place on her sleeve where the tea spilled. Mrs. McCormack can be heard in the hall, "Ye kids be clearing out of here or I'll call the janitor that quick." (Telephone rings.)

Gertrude (Answering.) Hello—The studio, you say—you have received an offer of a thousand dollars for "Childhood"—Will I accept it? (Hesi-

tates.) Please say that I have donated the picture to charity.

Mrs. Van Alystine (Rising quickly). That pleases me. I must hurry right out to get the announcement into the paper. The fact that you have refused a thousand dollars will make it even more valuable to us. (Exits hurriedly). (There is a moment's pause. Gertrude stands by the side of the table—picks up the photograph Mrs. Van Alystine left).

Gertrude—"We can both go through life carrying the same sweet memory," she said. She wanted it so. She thinks she has the right . . . I let her think it . . . and it all belongs to me.

(She sinks into a chair beside the table and her head falls upon her arm. Ethel enters, walks to the window and parts the curtains. A stream of the late afternoon sunshine floods the opening.

Ethel—Look, Gertrude, do come and look. They're wrecking that old building across the street. The dark ugly walls are down. They have stood in the way of our sharing the sunlight. See, the whole room's flooded.

(Just then Mrs. McCormack is heard outside the door).

Mrs. McCormack (Rushing in)—Miss Ethel, Miss Ethel, 'Tis that happy I am. The best of luck is smiling on me and little Pat. Just now Mrs. Van Alystine came out of your apartment. I met her in the hall. 'Tis a lot of interest she's taken in me

lad since the accident. Before I married me man, 'twas in her house for ten years I served as maid—and happy years they were. She says 'tis a sure thing the summer camp will be held out in the mountains and that she is going to see that me little Pat will be one of the first to go. 'Tis that happy I am for 'twill be makin' him well. (During the last of Mrs. McCormack's speech Gertrude has raised her tear-stained face to Mrs. McCormack. Slowly, as if unbelievable, there is the realization that she has found something she has long sought.

Gertrude—I see it! I see it! The idea I have long sought. You have brought it to me—you. The painting shall be a sequel to "Childhood". It shall be called "Motherhood". Success is mine. (She rushes to the door where the painting is.)

Mrs. McCormack—Faith, and what is it she's seen? Her mither's ghost?

The Pedler

By

FRITZ G. LANHAM

THE PEDLER

CHARACTERS

Frederick Garland, Harold Glenn, Jake Arrabolinski, Ethel Lane, Jane.

SCENE

The scene is the drawing-room of Ethel Lane's home. Its furnishings reflect taste and refinement. At the back is an arched entrance with appropriate hangings. At the right is a door, and in the foreground, by the wall, are an escritoire and small chair. A piano and seat occupy the corner of the room. A table and two chairs stand right center. A window at the left is attractively curtained, and a small table and chair are near it. A sofa stands left center.

As the curtain rises, Jane, a maid, is seated at the table at the right reading a novel.

Jane—"Tom and Jack had been just wonderful to her. (*The doorbell rings off left; Jane looks around, then resumes her reading.*) Tom had even saved her life, but Jack had had no chance to save it. But she was sure Jack loved her. Only the night before he had tried to tell her of his devotion, but was interrupted—(*the doorbell rings again; Jane turns her head, then continues reading*) —but was interrupted—(*again the doorbell rings; Jane pauses*)—but was interrupted by the untimely call of Frederick."

(*Frederick Garland enters through the arch.*)

Frederick (*with sarcasm*)—Good morning Jane!

Jane (*rising*)—Good morning, Mr. Garland. (*Aside.*) I am always interrupted by the untimely call of Frederick.

Frederick (*petulantly*)—No one at home, of course, or you would have answered the bell. That's what I surmised, so I walked in. (*He comes down and sits on the sofa.*) Where's Miss Ethel?

Jane—She has gone for a drive, sir.

Frederick—Oh, for a drive! (*He reflects.*) I'll wait for her, Jane.

Jane (*reluctantly*)—Yes, sir. (*She goes out at the door, reading.*) "—but was interrupted by the untimely call of Frederick."

Frederick (*looking after her*)—I'm afraid I disturbed her. This is a pretty domestic condition—a maid so absorbed in a silly love affair she can't

attend to her duties. And yet, I, a lawyer, am estopped from criticising her, for *I* am so absorbed in this love affair with Ethel that *my* duty becomes a mere bagatelle. Ethel! Ethel! You keep me more uneasy than I keep my clients; and all the time my claim is suffering from your neglect, my clients' claims are suffering from mine. (*He rises and goes to the table at the right.*) I suppose this is the way of the world but, until there is a choice between Harold and me, my affairs will be as tangled as the Gordian knot. But, after all, what is life without love—and what is love without a rival? (*He sits at the table*).

Harold (*singing off left*)—"O Genevieve, sweet Genevieve!"

Frederick—There's mine; jolly, as usual.

(*Harold Glenn, still singing, enters through the arch.*)

Harold—"The days may come, the days may go—" (*He sees Frederick.*) Why, hello, old chap! When did you roll in? (*Frederick rises and they shake hands.*) Thought you were away on some legal expedition? Back to tear down my fences, eh?

Frederick (*resuming his seat*)—Well, not exactly; but I'm sure you haven't been repairing mine during my absence.

Harold—No, I suppose not. Strange how she keeps the two of us on the fence, isn't it? Ethel's a case.

Frederick—Yes, she is a case that is keeping one lawyer decidedly in doubt.

Harold (*sitting on an arm of the sofa*)—Oh, I see; you have made your appeal and are waiting for the final decision. I presume that is a case in which you represent yourself—and misrepresent me.

Frederick—Hardly that.

Harold—That's right. I believe two rivals were never more congenial. Think of the mean things we could have said about each other—and haven't. (*He looks significantly at Frederick, who returns the glance and smiles; Harold rises and advances toward him.*) But cheer up, old gloomy lover. It's all over with me. A little incident occurred last night which puts me out of running—and it *may* dispose of you.

Frederick—Indeed!

Harold—Yes, I rather think it *does* dispose of you. (*He puts his hands in his pockets.*) What is your financial standing?

Frederick—So it relates to money, eh?

Harold—Yes; ridiculous, isn't it? But, my boy, if you haven't the coin, you don't stand the ghost of a show to buy your happiness in this shop. The little lady who has set our hearts fluttering is mercenary through and through. She told me last night, in no uncertain terms, that the money value of the man she marries must be expressed in—well, in no uncertain terms. And, besides, when she regaled me with this hymeneal sentiment, matrimony was al-

most as far from my thoughts as it was from my conversation.

Frederick—She told you that? That's strange! (*He takes a letter from his pocket and hands one page to Harold.*) Here; read that.

Harold (*reading*)—Same thing, almost *verbatim.* When did you get this? (*He returns the page to Frederick, who replaces it and puts the letter in his pocket*).

Frederick—You know, I have been over at Braxton for the last ten days on business. Before I left there yesterday I received this letter from Ethel in which, as you see, she takes pains to tell me that the man she marries must be wealthy and that, if he has wealth, he need have nothing more. So she has been goading you with this same unreasonable story?

Harold—She certainly has; told me money could buy all the happiness she cares for.

Frederick (*rising*)—She doesn't believe anything of the sort. Something's wrong. She wouldn't marry just any man simply because he had a bank roll—would she? Perhaps some new fellow with a fortune is about to enter the field and she is adopting this plan to make me jealous.

Harold—Maybe so.

Frederick—Ethel has never impressed me as a golddigger.

Harold (*sitting on an arm of the sofa*)—Well,

she knows about what I make out of my civil engineering, and I know it's not enough to buy all the happiness *I* care for. If she's sincere—well, you can count me out in the first round.

Frederick—But she's not sincere; it isn't natural. Why, she has money enough in her own name to live in luxury the rest of her life. There's a trick somewhere.

(*Ethel Lane enters through the arch, carrying a few small bundles; attracted by the conversation, she stops to listen, shielded by the hangings.*)

Frederick (*continuing*)—Ethel is a great joker, you know. Now, confidentially, I have money; but she knows nothing of it. I kept this a secret when I came here from the North. I wanted to see if a young lawyer could fight his own way in the West and win on merit. I contend that the same principle applies in love affairs which applies in business affairs; so you need not mention that I am rich.

Harold—Oh, don't worry; *I* won't tell her.

Frederick (*firmly*)—But, if she ever loves me, it will be for myself alone! (*He resumes his seat*).

Ethel (*aside*)—What a bad bargain!

Harold (*applauding Frederick*)—Bravo! That line is from "*The Duke's Secret.*" You've been reading cheap literature, Frederick. (*He rises, moves nearer Frederick and speaks deliberately.*) But, seriously, we can't afford to let Ethel catch us in a trap. If

it's a joke, suppose we meet it with a better one. I have an idea.

Frederick—The first idea's a good one; what's the second?

Harold—Now, she says positively that she will marry *any* man with money.

Frederick—Yes.

Harold—Well, here's my scheme. When I was at college I was a member of the dramatic club and appeared in a number of character roles. I still have make-up costumes of various kinds at home. Suppose I go and make up as a very ordinary fellow—say, a pedler?

Ethel (*aside*)—The plot thickens.

Frederick—Go on.

Harold—Then in half an hour I'll come here in my disguise and in some way gain admission to this room. While I am selling—or trying to sell—my goods to Ethel, you come in, lawyer that you are, ascertain my name—I'll assume one for the occasion—tell me I am the very man you've been looking for, and that a large estate has been left me by some rich relation in the old country.

Frederick—Fine!

Harold—But on condition, mind you, that I get married at once.

Frederick—I see.

Harold—Here I'll be, apparently rich as Croesus

and ugly as sin, and I'll propose to Ethel on the spot.

Ethel (*aside*)—And I have been trying for months to make him propose!

Harold—This will put her sentiment to the test, you see. If she refuses to marry me—which of course, she will—I'll remove the disguise and the two of us can give her the laugh.

Frederick (*rising*)—That *is* a clever scheme. I stand a chance to lose by it, because she may call our hands and marry you, but I'll risk it.

(*Ethel goes out through the arch.*)

Harold (*shaking Frederick's hand*)—Good; it's a bargain. Remember, then, we'll meet here in half an hour.

(*The two start to leave, Frederick crossing back of Harold as they move toward the arch, placing Frederick left and Harold right, but they are interrupted by the entrance of Ethel; she pretends to be just returning.*)

Ethel (*holding the bundles in her left arm and coming down.*) Good morning, boys! Glad to have you back with us, Frederick. (*She shakes hands with Frederick.*) Hello, Harold. I hope I haven't kept you waiting long. (*She moves back of the table at the right, removes her hat and places it, with the bundles, on the table.*) Won't you be seated?

Frederick—Why, Ethel, its—

Ethel—Oh, come, come; no excuses. (*Harold sits*

uneasily at the table, taking the chair at the right, and Frederick goes to the sofa.) Isn't it a glorious morning? I've been for a drive and, incidentally, did a little shopping; but now (*she takes the chair at the left of the table.*) I have nothing to do for an hour or so and we can have a nice, long chat. (*She looks at one, then at the other, then straight ahead; Harold and Frederick exchange ominous glances.*)

Harold (*rising*)—Ethel, I'd like to talk, you know—really—but—why—(*he looks at his watch*)—you see, I have a very important engagement in just a few minutes—ah—haven't I Frederick?

Frederick (*rising*)—Yes, yes, so he has. We've been waiting for you some time, Ethel, and—

Ethel—Oh, sit down. Let the engagement go. This is the first time in weeks we've had an opportunity to gossip.

Harold—That's so; but business is business, you know.

Ethel (*rising*)—Yes, I suppose it is. I can't complain if vou really *must* go—but be sure to come back. (*She resumes seat*).

Harold (*going toward the arch*)—Oh, I'll come back all right. (*He waves his handkerchief at Frederick who returns the wave as Harold leaves*).

Frederick—I must confess I can't see any special reason for him to come back. He is a poor man and, if you mean what you wrote in this letter to

me, his chance of marrying you is quite as unfavorable as mine.

Ethel—Oh, marriage, Frederick! That's out of the question. Let's not speak of it. When I marry, I must marry a fortune; that's all there is to it.

Frederick—So you think you would be willing to marry any man with a fortune?

Ethel—Certainly; *any* man.

Frederick—Then fellows whose faces are their fortunes have little credit with you?

Ethel—None at all. The commercial world must trust my husband's money, not his face.

Frederick—I believe I look at it the same way.

Ethel—Now, that's sensible. You wouldn't want to marry a girl, even were she desperately in love with you, just to make her miserable in poverty? You wouldn't want to make one mistrust you?

Frederick—I have been trying to make one Miss trust me.

Ethel—Indeed!

Frederick—You know I have. And it's the futility of my endeavor to create such a trust which has induced me to believe that you—in fact, all girls—should marry for money.

Ethel—Sensible fellow!

Frederick—Ethel, I have always been a good friend of yours—haven't I?

Ethel (*rising and going over behind Frederick*)—Why of course, you have.

Frederick—Well, I'm going to prove my sincerity. I believe I have a chance to do you a little friendly turn for which you will thank me.

Ethel—And what is this little friendly turn?

Frederick—It's rather peculiar, but I think I am on the track of a man who will meet exactly your matrimonial requirements. My work has been a little out of my line of late; I've been a detective.

Ethel—A detective! How interesting!

Frederick—Yes, it *is* interesting. A few days ago I received a letter from a very distinguished foreigner soliciting my services in an attempt to locate the heir to an enormous estate. It seems that several years ago he came to America because of some misunderstanding with his people. Since his arrival here, he has made his living at odd jobs, doing whatever his hands have found to do. He is thought to be at present in this part of the country.

Ethel—That sounds promising. Let me help you find him. I have always hoped to marry some great foreigner.

Frederick—But you must remember, Ethel, that he is little more now than a mere tramp.

Ethel (*moving toward the center*)—Oh, that lends an air of romance. And then, he has a fortune awaiting him; Think of it!

Frederick (*rising*)—Yes, I *am* thinking of it.

too. (*He goes to the arch.*) I am going to work and give you an opportunity to think of it. And, as you think, you might also be on the lookout for this roving nabob. (*He goes out*).

Ethel (*standing by the arch, speaking to Frederick as he leaves*)—Yes, Frederick; I shall. (*She returns to the table.*) So they have compared notes and have discovered that I have been planning a joke on them; and, in return, they have planned one on me. Isn't that jolly? I believe their joke is a better one than mine. I'll just help them out with it. Harold coming disguised as a pedler! And he's going to propose! Oh, the dear fellow! I hope he doesn't forget that part of it. Let me see! He hopes in some way to gain admission to this room. Well, I'll see that he has no difficulty in that. (*She presses a bell at the table.*) Oh, if he doesn't propose! (*Jane enters at the door*).

Jane—Did you ring, Miss?

Ethel—Yes, Jane, (*Jane advances to center.*) I am expecting a pedler to come to the house this morning. When he arrives show him into this room.

Jane—Yes, Miss.

Ethel (*gathering her bundles and hat.*) And make him as comfortable as possible.

Jane—Yes, Miss.

Ethel—This is a little secret of mine, Jane. I am preparing to give a friend a genuine surprise. (*She goes out at the door*).

Jane (*setting the furniture in order*)—That's just like Miss Ethel! she's always playing a prank on somebody. I'll keep handy this time and see the fun myself. (*The door bell rings.*) Maybe, that's the pedler now. (*She goes to the window and peeps out.*) Yes, he looks like one. (*The bell rings again.*) Oh, I'm coming! (*She goes through the arch, answers the bell and re-enters.*) Just walk right in here, sir. (*Jake Arrabolinski enters slowly through the arch, a small pack on his back; mystified by his reception, he halts and stares blankly ahead.*)

Jane (*aside*)—I have seen that man somewhere before. (*To Jake.*) Have a chair, sir. (*Jake looks at her, then at the chair.*) Be seated a moment while I call Miss Ethel. (*Jake looks at Jane, points to himself and then to the sofa, as if asking if he must be seated; Jane nods assent; Jake sits very cautiously on the upholstered sofa, then shakes his head dubiously.*) Where have I seen him before? (*Jane goes out the door slowly, gazing intently at Jake; when she is gone, Jake peers about uneasily, rises, walks toward the arch and reaches it just as Ethel enters right*).

Ethel—Good morning! (*Jake stops abruptly; aside.*) Harold is about to back out of it. He always did lack nerve. (*To Jake.*) Good morning! (*Jake nods.*) Do you wish to see me?

Jake (*timidly*)—No. (*Ethel starts toward him.*) Hm-m—yas! (*A smile replaces gradually his expression of fear*).

Ethel—Then be seated, won't you?

Jake—Me seet down?

Ethel—Yes, be seated.

Jake—You don't know I'm a pedler.

Ethel—Oh, yes, I know you're a pedler.

Jake—You know eet?

Ethel—Why, of course, I know it.

Jake (*shaking his head*)—Day don' dreat pedlers dees way udder places.

Ethel—Perhaps not; but you are among friends now. (*Jake regards her with perplexity.*) I mean you are with people who sympathize with you. (*She sits at the table at the right.*) What are you peddling?

Jake (*coming nearer and taking a small box from his pack*)—Dees. (*He hands the box to Ethel*).

Ethel—And what is it for?

Jake—Cleanz Panz.

Ethel (*returning the box to Jake*)—Cleans pants? Is that so? (*She presses the bell before her.*) I'll see if it does. (*Jane enters.*) Jane, father has an old pair of trousers in the back hall closet; bring them here.

Jane (*her eyes fixed on Jake*)—Yes, Miss. (*She goes out at the door*).

Jake—Make 'em schleek an' shiny.

Ethel—Father has worn these so long I suspect they are slick and shiny already. (*Jane enters with*

a pair of trousers and hands them to Ethel, who offers them to Jake.) There your are. (*He does not take them*).

Jake (*explaining*)—No, no, not panz; panz! Cook een de panz!

Ethel—Oh, I see; pans that you cook in?

Jake (*nodding*)—Yas!

Ethel (*handing the trousers to Jane*)—Here, Jane, take these back and bring me a pan from the kitchen. (*Jane takes the trousers and goes out gazing at Jake, who notes her gaze*).

Jake (*aside*)—Dat girl like me.

Ethel—Don't you sometimes get tired of being a pedler and wish you were something else—say, a civil engineer? (*She looks searchingly at Jake*).

Jake—Oh, Engeneer! Ride on de drain! Yas. I walk now.

Ethel (*aside*)—Harold is playing the part beautifully. (*Jane enters with a pan; she gives it to Ethel, who hands it to Jake and he begins to clean it; as Jane goes out, Ethel talks with him as he works.*) You haven't been a pedler always, have you?

Jake—No; once I was a baby.

Ethel—But you have been peddling since you were grown?

Jake—No lady. (*He stops work on the pan.*) Seence I lost me leetle seester.

Ethel (*with mock sympathy*)—Oh; Then you've lost a little sister?

Jake—Yas, lady; de sweetes' leetle girl ever was. Eet was long time ago. Me mudder was poor, an' me leetle seester leeved away een annudder town wid me fadder's seester. Fadder was dead. One day me mudder got seek—awful seek—an' we got on de drain to go see her 'fore she died. We came to a seety, an' een de seety de drain go een beeg tunnel. An' den—we run 'gainst anudder drain. An den—ah, I don' know. Ebryt'ing was black. W'en I woke up ag'in I was een de horspeetal; an' me leetle seester—I ain't nebber seen her no mo'. (*He puts his bandana to his eyes and sobs*).

Ethel (*aside*)—Harold ought to go on the stage.

Jake (*conquering his emotion and flourishing the pan.*) See de pan, lady; bright!

Ethel (*taking the pan, looking at it and putting it on the table*)— Yes, that does very well. (*Aside, as Jake dries his eyes.*) If Frederick plays his part this well, they may have me believing them yet. I wonder why he doesn't come?

Jake—An' deeshes; eet cleanz old deeshes, too.

Ethel (*pressing bell*)—Oh, does it? (*Jane enters.*) Jane, an old dish. (*Jane goes for the dish.*) This seems to be a very wonderful preparation. Do you like to clean dishes?

Jake—Yes, lady.

Ethel (*aside*)—What a fine husband Harold will

make. (*Jane enters with a dish, which she hands to Ethel, who gives it to Jake.*) Here is a nice large one for you.

Jake (*setting to work on the dish*)—Oh, beeg one! Dees will make eet w'ite an' purty. (*Jane goes out, her eyes riveted on Jake; Frederick enters through the arch*).

Ethel (*aside*)—The other joker at last!

Frederick—Hello, Ethel. I beg your pardon for coming in unannounced, but I'm in a hurry. (*He goes near her and speaks to her softly.*) You remember the heir to the fortune?

Ethel—Yes.

Frederick—Well, I have been following this fellow about (*he indicates Jake*) and I believe he is the very man I'm after.

Ethel—Good! Isn't that lucky? I congratulate you on finding him so soon.

Frederick—Yes, it is lucky. And now, Ethel, if you will be good enough to get me a note book and pencil, we'll see what we can learn from him.

Ethel—Certainly; just a minute. (*She goes to the escritoire and finds a note book and pencil, she reflects, puts them back and soliloquizes as Frederick walks over to Jake.*) They want a chance to confer. (*She goes out at the door*).

Frederick (*slapping Jake heartily on the shoulder*)—Say, old man, your make-up's great! And these! (*He points to Jake's whiskers.*) They're just

as good as if they were real! (*He pulls a hair from Jake's beard; Jake blurts out a protesting "Oh" and is in the act of striking Frederick as Ethel re-enters*).

Ethel—Gentlemen!!

Jake (*apologetically*)—Excuse, please.

Frederick (*advancing and meeting Ethel by the table*)—Yes, you see, Ethel, he doesn't understand me! (*He takes the note book and pencil which Ethel proffers*).

Jake—No; I don' understand heem. (*Ethel laughs and sits at the table; Jake comes nearer Ethel, and Frederick crosses left*).

Frederick (*flourishing the note book and pencil*)—Now, sir, may I ask your name?

Jake (*addressing Ethel*)—Tell heem?

Ethel—Oh, yes, tell him.

Jake—Jake.

Frederick (*writing*)—I see—Jake. What is your last name?

Jake—Arrabolinski.

Frederick—What!!!

Jake—Arrabolinski.

Frederick (*addressing Jake*)—Say, for heaven's sake, how did you ever come to select such a name as that? You'll ruin this whole thing yet. (*He repeats his inquiry.*) Once more, please; what is your surname?

Jake—Arrabolinski.

Frederick (*nonplussed; tapping the pencil against the note book*)—That's a funny name.

Jake—Dat was me fadder's name.

Ethel—Yes; that was your father's name, wasn't it, Jake?

Jake—Yas.

Frederick—It's a peculiar name, you know. I just wanted to be sure. That's the name all right. (*He writes in note book.*) Mr. Rarablinski, you are the very man I have been looking for. I have quite a surprise for you. You have fallen heir to a large fortune.

Jake (*in great surprise*)—Money!! (*He drops the dish, which breaks; he is bewildered for a moment; and then his face brightens.*) Oh I can pay for dat wid some ob de money!

Frederick—Yes, Mr. Garaswinski, a rich uncle of yours has just died in the old country and he has left you more money than you can possibly use. *I* have been authorized to deliver it.

Jake (*eagerly*)—Den geeve eet to me. I need eet.

Frederick—To be sure; but not so fast. (*He detains Jake with a gesture.*) It was left upon one condition.

Jake (*perplexed*)—Con—condition?

Frederick—Yes; that is, there is one thing you must do before you get it.

Jake—W'at mus' I do?

Frederick—You must marry.

Jake (*greatly astonished*)—Marry?

Frederick—Yes, sir; it is expressly stipulated that you must marry.

Jake (*shaking his head sorrowfully*)—I can' do eet.

Frederick—Can't do it!!!

Jake—I'm married already; day'll put me een preeson.

Ethel (*aside*)—Harold is inserting a few novel features.

Frederick (*speaking earnestly to Jake*)—Oh, look here! This is enough of this foolishness. You know you're not married. Do you want to spoil this whole business and make me out a fool?

Jake—Got a wife an' two leetle boys in San Francis.

Frederick (*upbraiding Jake*)—Say, you are about to play this joke on me instead of Ethel. (*He soliloquizes.*) I must correct this some way. He'll make a botch of it. (*He speaks out boldly.*) But I can prove you are *not* married.

Ethel (*addressing Jake*)—Why, I know that you are not married.

Jake—Eh?

Frederick—Yes, she knows that.

Jake (*to Ethel*)—You know eet?

Ethel—Certainly, I do.

Jake (*going to the table at the left and sitting dejectedly*)—Maybe so. I guess I don' know somet'ing at all.

Frederick—You don't if you think you're married. But I can tell you one thing; it won't be any trouble for you to *get* married. This young lady here will jump at the chance.

Ethel (*aside*)—That's so; I'd marry Harold any day.

Jake (*incredulously*)—Dees lady marry me?

Ethel (*rushing to his side and kneeling*)—Yes, dear, and rejoice to have such a prince for a husband.

Jake—I deedn' know I was so fine.

Frederick (*aside*)—Heaven protect me! Ethel was in earnest; She *is* in love with money! I musn't lose her this way. (*He argues with Ethel.*) Yes, Ethel, but you just heard him say he's married. You can't marry him; he'd be a bigamist.

Ethel—But you just said you could prove that he is *not* married.

Frederick (*in despair*)—Oh, worse and worse!

Ethel (*beseechingly to Jake*)—And, dear, if you *are* still single, you *will* marry me, won't you?

Jake—I guess so. Ask heem (*he indicates Frederick*); he knows.

Ethel—*He* shall not stand between us. No one can ever take you from me. I love you with all my heart, and I have loved you from the moment I first saw you. (*She throws her arms around his neck and kisses him*).

Frederick (*aside*)—She kissed him!!!

Ethel (*rising, much puzzled, and looking straight ahead*)—He's been eating garlic!!

Harold (*shouting off left*)—Knives to grind! Knives to grind!

Frederick (*aside*)—There's something wrong!

Ethel (*aside*)—Why, that's Harold! I've made a mistake! (*Ethel goes hurriedly to the table at the right; Harold enters through the arch, clumsily disguised as a pedler; he comes between Frederick and Jake and looks from one to the other, unable to understand the situation*).

Harold (*aside*)—It looks queer, but I suppose it's all right.

Ethel (*speaking sharply to Harold*)—Well!!

Harold—Fairly well, thank you. Have you any knives to grind?

Ethel—No, sir! Have you any axe to grind?

Harold—Certainly not.

Ethel—Then why on earth are you making a fool of yourself, Harold?

Harold—Harold?

Ethel—Yes, Harold! You surely don't think any

one would have the slightest difficulty recognizing you in that clumsy make-up?

Harold (*aside*)—And I thought I was clever.

Ethel—You must be losing your mind. (*She rings the bell.*) Sit down and keep cool a minute. Try not to get violent. I'll send for something to relieve you. (*Jane enters.*) Jane, bring Mr. Glenn something to revive him. He's a trifle ill today.

Harold—No, no, Jane; never mind. I'm all right. Ethel, I can explain it—(*Frederick puts a finger to his lips, warningly*)—some other time. Just let me sit here. I'll be better directly. (*He sits on the sofa*).

Ethel—Oh, I'm not worrying so much about you, Harold, but you have interrupted a very important business engagement between Frederick and Mr. Arrabolinski.

Jane—Arrabolinski? Is that your name, sir?

Jake—Dat was eet w'en I come een.

Jane—Jake Arrabolinski?

Jake (*rising*)—Yas, dat's eet.

Jane—Jake, have you forgotten me? I am Teeny! (*She rushes into Jake's arms*).

Jake (*embracing Jane fondly*)—Teeny! Me leetle seester! Me leetle seester!

Ethel (*aside*)—Now I begin to understand it all. (*She speaks to Jane.*) Yes, Jane; you remember I

told you I was expecting a pedler and that I was preparing a surprise for a friend of mine?

Jane—Why, of course, I remember!

Ethel—Well, you are the friend, Jane, and this (*she indicates Jake*) is the surprise. (*Aside.*) I am getting out of this muddle nicely. (*Jake and Jane go to the piano-seat and sit and converse earnestly*).

Frederick—Ethel, I don't want to intrude in a private family reunion, so, if you will excuse me—

Ethel—One moment, Frederick. You have not yet paid Mr. Arrabolinski the money his uncle left him.

Frederick (*nervously*)—The money? Oh yes, the money.

Jake—Nebber mind; I got me leetle seester now.

Ethel—But you shall have the money, too. It belongs to you; and Mr. Garland wouldn't withhold it for the world—would you, Mr. Garland?

Frederick—Oh, no, no; certainly not.

Harold (*addressing Frederick*)—I believe she has you cornered.

Ethel—Come, Frederick! The money!

Frederick—Why—ah—why, I haven't the money with me.

Ethel (*taking a check book from the escritoire*)—That doesn't matter. Give a check on your bank; that will do.

Frederick (*accepting the check-book reluctantly*) —Oh, yes—yes—a check. Well, you see Ethel, it wasn't very much money that was left him.

Ethel—You said it was a large fortune.

Frederick—Yes, so I did. I meant it would seem like a large fortune to him. It was just a thousand dollars.

Ethel—That's small, its true, but it will help Jane and her brother for a while. Just give me a check for the thousand. (*Frederick stares ahead.*) Frederick! The check for the thousand.

Frederick—Yes, yes; of course. (*He sits at the table left and speaks complainingly to Harold as he writes the check.*) Here's where I pay a thousand dollars for that clever idea of yours.

Harold—I believe that's a little more than it was worth.

Frederick (*gruffly, as he rises and gives the check to Ethel.*) There you are!

Ethel—Thank you. But perhaps you do not deserve my thanks. I dare say you are making a snug little fee for this.

Frederick (*aside*)—Oh, think of it! (*He starts to go*).

Ethel (*detaining him*)—One thing more, Frederick; don't forget me when you find a man with money.

Frederick (*standing by the arch*)—I hope when I

do find a man with money, he'll know better how to use it. (*He goes out*).

Ethel (*looking at Harold, who sits dejected, and then at Jane and Jake chatting merrily*)—O, Jane; take your brother out and show him the flowers. Father needs a gardener, you know.

Jane—Yes, Miss Ethel.

Ethel—And, maybe—sometime—Jake could bring his family. We'll discuss that—and the check—when you come back.

Jane—You're very kind, Miss Ethel. (*She goes toward the arch*).

Jake (*following Jane*)—Oh, thank you, lady. (*He leaves with Jane*).

Ethel—And now, as for you, Harold, I can't see any justification for your conduct at all.

Harold (*rising and approaching Ethel*)—*But*, Ethel, I can explain it. Really, I can.

Ethel—No; I don't care to hear your explanation. Promise me you will never try to explain it.

Harold—And if I do promise, will you give me your promise, Ethel?

Ethel (*with mock bewilderment*)—My promise!

Harold—You know what promise I mean. (*He takes her hands*).

Ethel—O, Harold! This is so sudden! (*They embrace*).

'Limination

By

JAMES H. NEWETT

Price for Production, $7.50.

Permission must be obtained from the publishers, Southwest Press.

'LIMINATION

(A Comedy in One Act)

(The action of this play takes place in the one-room shack of *Lige Williams*, a negro tenant cotton farmer by occupation and a preacher by avocation.) *Lige's* cotton patch is located in East Texas, in Henderson County. In addition to *Lige* the persons of the play are *Elvira*, a young negro woman about twenty years, *Lige's* daughter, for whose affection *Simon* and *Moses* are rivals. *Simon* is the bully of the community, a heavy set, large boned and muscled negro. *Moses* is his opposite. both in stature and intellect. *Fanny* is *Lige's* wife and *Elvira's* mother. She is spare of build, but not of discourse.

As the curtain rises, showing the interior of the shack, *Elvira* is disclosed standing beside a small wood-burning stove that is used for heating and cooking purposes. She is singing "De ol' Ark am a-movin' ", when she is interrupted by a light and cautious knocking on the door, which is open. She stops her singing long enough to cry out, "Come in."

Moses (Peeking in at the door timorously)—is yuh all 'lone?

Elvira—Yas honey, I'se 'lone.

Moses—Is yuh 'spectin' anybody?

Elvira—No, I ain't 'spectin' nobody 'cept you. What yuh so scairt fo'?

Moses—It am dat big nigger agin'.

Elvira—Yuh means dat no 'count Simon?

Moses—Uh huh.

Elvira—How come yo'se 'fraid o' him Moses?

Moses—How come? Sugar yuh dosen't mean to tell me dat yuh is dat ig'nant?

Elvira—Nigger, be careful. I doesn't like dem dar sen'ments.

Moses—I doesn't aim to talk to yuh dat a-way honey, but I'se dat scairt.

Elvira—Don' yuh talk to me like dat no mo'.

Moses—But honey, I'se so 'fraid o' dat dar Simon.

Elvira—I doesn't guess dat yuh got much to be scairt over. He ain't goin' to kill yuh, I reckon.

Moses—Dat's jes' it honey.

Elvira—I doesn't apprehend yo' meanin'.

Moses—Mind what I tells yuh. Dat dar nigger ain't gwine to git glad 'til I'se dead 'n he kills me.

Elvira (with interest)—What is yuh aimin' to say, Moses?

Moses—Yuh see it am like dis. Dis evenin' bein' Sat'day everybody was in town, 'n when I gits dar, why Jeff, das de boy which works on Mr. Wiggins patch down de road a piece, he say to me, "Simon am lookin' fo' you, better watch out".

Elvira—Well I declare it wan't fo' no good.

Moses—'N den I sees Joe, Judge Hatch's boy, what says to me, "Mose' yuh ain't seen Simon, has yuh?" 'N when I shakes my head he jes' sniggers 'n walks off.

Elvira—Dat low down nigger. He ain't got de sense he's bo'n 'thout.

Moses—He ain't got no sense, but he sho' has got got a pow'ful stout fist.

Elvira—Ain't hit de truf.

Moses—'N he done tol' dat der yaller boy Jake, yo' cousin, dat him 'n Jake ud soon be kin, soon's he got me out o' de way.

Elvira—Well I likes dat, 'thout even axin' me 'bout it.

Moses—He done tol' yuh 'pappy dat if he ever cotch dat little white-livered nigger, meanin' me, dat he was fixin' to break his bones, 'n use dem to pick his teef wif.

Elvira—He sho' am a bad man, dat Simon am.

Moses—Yuh doesn't love him does yuh, honey?

Elvira—I likes strong 'n brave ones, sugar.

Moses—Doesn't yuh love, me Elvira?

Elvira—Sho' I love yuh, but—

Moses—Ain't yuh goin' to marry me?

Elvira—Yes I is, ef Simon don' bust yo' head fo' ever I gits a chance to marry yuh.

Moses—Ef he bust my head den yuh marries him, honey?

Elvira—I ain't sayin' as how I'se gwine to marry nobody. I doesn't say I marries him, 'n I doesn't say I doesn't.

Moses—Oh! honey.

Elvira—Widows am better 'n bein' wives, any how.

Moses—Ef yuh was his widow dat ud be de truf.

Elvira—Hush yo' mouf, foolishness. I ain't his wife yet.

Moses—'N yuh ain't mine yit.

Elvira—Faint heart ain't won no fair lady yit, das what de Bible says.

Moses—How come I ain't got no strong heart? It am beatin' fo' you mos' o' de' time, jes' like a mockin' bird a singin' to de moon.

Elvira—Who says anything 'bout yo' heart, but yuh got to use yo' head to git dat bad man. Don' need yo' heart. Mose' I is su'prised at you.

Moses—Das right honey. Don' I know it? But listen heah.

Elvira—I'se listenin'. Disgorge you'se'f

Moses—We got to 'liminate him.

Elvira—Mus' what?

Moses—'Liminate—'liminate—

Elvira—I doesn't git yo' meanin'.

Moses—Well, it am jes' like dis. When comes somebody in yo' way why yuh 'liminates him.

Elvira—'Xactly. Wif a gun o' some sich way?

Moses—No honey, not dat a way. When yuh 'liminates yuh does like white folks does. Ain't no fo'ce no how. He jes' uses his legs 'n goes away f'um heah.

Elvira—I sees. De country gits too hot fo' him. I thinks yuh git better'n better, Mose'. How does we do dis heah 'liminatin'?

Moses—Gi' me time, chile, gi' me time. I'se jes' beginnin' to figure it out.

Elvira—Better do it fast. Yuh ain't got much time a-fore they returns f'um town.

Moses—Honey, why fo' does yuh talk like dat? It makes me shiver all over to heah it.

Elvira—Well you is fixin' to git a lot colder dis yere winter when dem no'thers comes a blowin' across yo' grave.

Moses—Elvira, don' talk that way all o' de time, jes' when I'se fixin' to do a little 'liminatin'.

Elvira (Turning her attention to the stove)—I done clean fo'got dat possum 'count o' listenin' to yo' high talk 'bout 'liminatin'.

Moses—Honey, I'se sorry.

Elvira—You is sorry lookin'.

Moses—Ef dat nigger ud only stay out o' it.

Elvira—Heah yuh is, Moses. Eat dis yere piece o' possum 'n dis yere co'n bread 'n git yo' spirits back in yo' stomach ey yuh can't git dem in yo' heart.

Moses—Thank yuh, Elvira. Yuh so' does make a pow'ful good wife. Ef yuh ain't de cookin'est gal I know.

Elvira—I makes a good wife, ef it don't come dat Simon don' git me fust.

Moses—Sugar, don' (He stops terrified as he hears the sound of voices and wagon wheels in the yard.) Oh, Lawdy, who am dat?

Elvira (Going to the door)—It am mammy 'n pappy 'n—

Moses—Yas, Elvira. Who am wif dem?

Elvira—Praise de Lawd!

Moses (pleading)—Who am dar, honey?

Elvira (To those outside)—Hi, mammy. Hi dar, pappy. Hi, Simon.

Moses—Lawdy, Lawdy, I'se scairt I'se gwine to die soon.

Elvira—Hush up yo' cryin' fo' de Lawd.

Moses—Lawdy, Lawdy.

Elvira—Hush up I says. Yuh sho'ly am fixin' to die ef Simon heah yuh.

Moses—Lawd ha' mercy on me 'n fo'give my sins.

Elvira—Heah you Mose, shut up yo' mouf, or Simon'll be doin some 'liminatin' 'round 'bout heah right smart, and it ain't nobody else but you, he 'liminates. De lawd he'ps dem what he'ps desse'fs.

Moses—Yas, honey, I knows, but what is I gwine to do? Mus' I try 'n git out O' yere?

Elvira (As the voices come nearer)—So Simon kin make barbecue out o' yuh. Listen heah.

Moses (Meekly)—Yas'm.

Elvira (Indicating an old enameled iron bed)—Git yo'se'f un'er dat dar bed, 'n I pulls down de covers so dey can't see yuh at all.

Moses (with alacrity)—Yo sho' is smart Elvira.

Elvira—Mus' be dat one o' us am smart, 'n it ain't you.

Moses—I does what you say do. (He slips under the bed, while Elvira arranges the cover, so as to conceal him. She walks back to the stove and resumes her singing. As she hears footsteps she stops her song).

Elvira—Heah they come.

Moses (From under the bed)—Who?

Elvira—Hush yo' mouf (To Simon as he enters). Evenin' Simon.

Simon—Howdy, sugar.

Elvira—Where is mammy?

Fanny (Coming in the door with packages in her hand)—Heah I is.

Simon (To Elvira)—Ain't you goin' to ask me to sit down?

Fanny—Elvira, he is goin' to stay for supper.

Elvira—How come pappy didn't come back with yo' all?

Fanny—He am out in de back, unhitchin' de hosses.

Elvira—Simon, how come yuh to be heah wif my mammy 'n pappy?

Simon—Little queen o' my heart, I met up wif dem in town, 'n when I sees dem I axed to take me 'long so's I could see my little Magnolia blossom.

Elvira—Simon, what is you aimin' to do? Is yuh makin' love to me, jes' like yus does to all de odder gals I heard 'bout?

Simon—Kin de hummin' bird, keep way f'um de honeysuckle vine? Sugar, I'se human.

Elvira—Das jes' it. You is jes' too human.

Simon—Bin dat little nigger a-talkin' to yuh agin'?

Elvira—Means which?

Simon—Means dat little white-livered Mose' which use' whine heah 'bouts mos' o' de time.

Fanny (Going over to the bed and sitting on it with her legs very near to where Moses' head is protruding out from under the bed cover)—Dat dar no'count nigger don't nevver come triflin' 'round 'bout heah no mo'.

Elvira—'Count of he am scairt o' you.

Fanny—He sho' do stay 'way f'um heah. Uh huh. He am makin' hisse'f scarce.

Simon—I reckons he am a smart nigger after all. I don't guess he aims to come 'round heah no mo'.

Fanny—I doesn't reckon he does, Elvira, Simon say he got a secret.

Elvira—A which?

Simon—A secret.

Elvira—How come a secret?

Simon—I'se aimin' to tell yuh, when yo' daddy come in.

Elvira (With Alarm)—It ain't 'bout Mose' am it?

Simon—Him, Lawdy no.

Elvira—Ef it ain't 'bout him what kind o' secret am it?

Simon—'Pears you is pow'ful taken up wif dat no 'count nigger.

Elvira—We was jes' talkin' 'bout him, wan't we?

Simon—No honey, dis yere secret am jes' 'bout you, I'se fixin' to tell yuh, sugar puddin', soon as yo' daddy come in.

Elvira (Going to the door)—Dar he am now. (She goes out to meet him).

Fanny—Ain't nuthin' to keep yuh from stayin' fo' supper, am dar, Simon?

Simon—I don' reckon dar em. In fack, I hopes to be heah very frequent in de future.

Fanny—What am yuh fixin, to say, Simon?

Simon—It am de secret which I is 'bout to promulgate soon as yo' reverend husband comes in.

Fanny—Dar's some'pn 'bout dis dat I doesn't 'xactly care 'bout. (As she hears Elvira and Lige come in.) Dar dey is.

Lige—Well Simon, yuh am 'musin' de ladies as customary?

Simon—I craves de company o' de ladies at all times.

Fanny—I reckons dat yuh kin tell us dat dar secret o' you's now, Simon.

Simon—Yo' is a preacher 'o de gospel, Mr. Williams?

Lige—I is.

Simon—Yuh got yo' preachin' papers f'um de church?

Lige—Yas, I has de papers. Wait, I'll fetch dem.

Simon—No. Yo' word am not questioned.

Fanny (Darkly)—Reckon it am not hear 'bouts.

Simon—Den yuh kin marry folks?

Lige—I reckons as how I kin.

Simon—Has yuh ever married folks?

Lige—Mos' everybody 'roun' heah fo' de las' ten years, sence I come heah.

Simon—Kin folks git married 'thout a paper?

Lige—No. Yuh got to git a license.

Simon (Drawing a paper out of his pocket and showing it to Lige)—Ain't dis heah one of dem license yuh was talkin' 'bout?

Lige—Kin yuh read, Simon?

Simon—No suh.

Lige—Where f'um did yuh git dis yere paper?

Simon—Down at de gen'ral store. Come it ain't no good?

Lige—Sho' it am.

Simon—Uh huh?

Lige—It am a huntin' license.

Simon—I ain't aimin' to do no huntin' I'se aimin' to git married.

Lige—Marry which?

Simon—Preacher, I'se aimin' to marry dis heah gal o' yo'alls, Elvira.

Elvira—Praise de Lawd. (At this juncture, Moses is so shocked at the announcement that Simon has just made that he forgets himself and jerks his head out from under the bed covers so that it hits Fanny's legs. Fanny screams incoherently about "Hants" and ghosts, and makes a dash for the door followed by her husband and daughter and the amazed Simon, whose policy seems to be to run first and investigate afterwards. They are scarcely out of the door when they all peer in to see what the commotion was about. Elvira knowing all the time what had happened tries to dissuade them from investigating the matter any further for the time being. However, they all re-enter the shack continuously, Simon leading, then Elvira followed by Fanny, with Lige bringing up the rear).

Elvira—Simon don' yuh go in dar after it nohow.

Simon—I ain't scart o' nuthin'.

Elvira—How come yuh runs den, tell me dat?

Simon—You all hollered dat it were a hant.

Fanny—Well some'pn hit me on de legs, it did.

Lige—Jes' yo' 'magination:

Elvira—Das right, pappy, I don' guess it were a hant.

Simon—I'se not a gwine to give up dat easy. I'se gwine look under dat bed my se'f.

Elvira—It were'nt un'der de bed.

Fanny—I weren't no where else chile, 'cause I was settin' on de bed when it come along. It was a hant.

Elvira—Ain't no use to look un'ner de bed, Mammy.

Fanny—Lookin' am de on'iest way to be sho' honey.

Elvira—Well, I'se gwine to look un'ner de bed my se'f 'n den you all behin' de stove 'n in de wood pile un'ner de table.

Simon—Honey, I'se gwine to look un'ner de bed 'cause das whar de trouble done started.

Elvira—No, don' do dat. Lawdy, Lawdy.

Simon (Going to the bed and discovering Moses under it)—Heah am you'all's hant. It am dat dar nigger what I am aimin' to break his bones fo' to pick my teef wif.

(The scene that follows beggars description. Seeing that he has been discovered, Moses puts up a brave fight with the odds heavily against him. He is knocked down repeatedly only to rise again. Elvira urges him on from the side lines, while the parents do nothing but moan and ejaculate; impartial onlookers. Finally Simon deals Moses a terrific blow that lays him low).

Elvira—Simon, you dam black trash. Yuh done killed Moses.

Simon—What ef I done killed him? I'se glad he am dead.

Elvira—De law'll git you sho'.

Fanny—'N yuh'll hang fo' it.

Simon—But I wan't aimin' to kill him.

Elvira—But yuh has gone 'n done it jes' de same.

Lige—'N yuh done killed him in our house.

Fanny—'N de law'll git after us.

Simon—I don' guess I meant to kill him. (Goes over to Moses). Lemme look at him. Yassuh. (He shudders). He sho' am dead.

Fanny—Yuh'd better be fixin' to git yo'se'f out o' dis hear county or yuh is gwine to be a dead nigger, a good 'n dead one.

Simon (Going out of the door with Lige and Fanny)—Yuh—all knows I didn' mean to kill him. Yuh knows dat doesn' yuh all?

Lige (In his best clerical manner)—Brother Simon, dis ought to learn yuh a lesson not to do no mo' killin' in de open.

Simon—It have Parson. It have learned me.

(They all go outside save Elvira who runs over to Moses still lying on the floor).

Elvira—Speak to me honey chile. Mose speak to yu' own sugar puddin'. I loves yuh 'n I'se not gwine to marry nobody else ceptin' yuh.

Moses (Coming to and rising up)—Where is I, honey?

Elvira—You is heah wif yo' own sugar puddin'.

Moses—Where am Simon?

Simon (Putting his head in at the door)—Am he still dead?

Elvira—Yas he am still dead, deader 'n a polecat.

Moses (As Simon disappears)—Did I hurt him honey?

Elvira—No suh, but he like to kill you.

Moses—Yuh said nuthin' 'cept de right thing, sugar.

Elvira—Now, we'se got to 'liminate him.

Moses—How come?

Elvira—Simon ain't got no brains like he got fists, das how come?

Moses—Yas?

Elvira—Yuh got to play like dead 'til Simon has done got out o' de county.

Moses—I begins to see de light.

Elvira—I doesn't guess dat it am gwine to hurt yuh to play dead fo' a little bit.

Simon (Coming in with Fanny and Lige)—Ain't he come to life yit?

Elvira—No he ain't 'n what am mo' he ain't a gwine to. He am dead fo' good.

Simon—Oh Lawd, I didn't mean to kill him.

(Fanny bursts into tears, and Lige gets out his Bible).

Elvira—It am fixin' to git dark, Simon 'n yuh kin sneak off, 'n won't nobody see yuh, 'n know dat yuh was heah. But don' yuh stay 'round heah 'bouts in dis part o' de country or de law sho am gwine to git yuh.

Lige—What am we gwine to do? De law am gwine to git us sho'.

Elvira—We doesn' git to tell de law nuthin'. We'se gwine to bury dis heah nigger jes' as soon as de moon am riz so dat we kin see what we'se doin'.

Simon—Yuh sho is a smart girl, Elvira. Too bad it come about I can't marry yuh.

Elvira—While we is waitin fo' sundown we kin have de funeral.

Fanny—'N we kin give him a Christian burial.

Elvira—Pappy, begin it wif a hymn, will yuh?

(They all sing, even Simon joining in "Swing Low Sweet Chariot", low and gentle, in sweet, mellow tones. At the conclusion of the song Fanny is sobbing aloud as is Simon while Lige wipes his eyes to keep from weeping).

Elvira—Now Pappy, yuh kin say a prayer fo' de departed.

Lige (The prayer is said with great feeling and emotion. Fanny weeps aloud most of the time but manages to put in an "Amen" from time to time alternated with ejaculations of a religious nature such as "Glory be" and "Praise de Lawd", a pro-

fession of faith or religious practice in which she is joined by Simon and occasionally by the deceiving Elvira. The prayer is characteristic, starting out slowly and with a certainty as to what the content is going to be. Lige works up to the climax that is reached when Moses comes to life.)

Dear Lawd Jesus, we thank yuh fo' de good things that yuh have bestowed upon yo' chilluns. We is grateful and ful o' gratitude. We thanks you fo' our bread 'n our meat and fo' our cotton crop 'tho it have been a drought summer dis year Lawd. We thanks yuh fo' de sunshine, 'n we thanks yuh fo' de possum we is gwine to eat dis heah evenin', 'n likewise fo' everythin' else. We is sad dat Simon, he killed Mose', but it am jes' like de Bible, when Cain kill his brudder Abel, even tho de Lawd he say, yuh mus'n' kill nobody, not even yo' brudder. Maybe it ain't so bad Lawd, 'cause Moses ain't Simon brudder. He didn' mean to kill him Lawd, 'n he wish dat he war still livin' don'yuh, Simon?

Simon—Yas, Lawd.

Lige—Lawd, de departed was a good Christian, 'n we hope dat you is aimin' to let him git t'hu dem dar pearly gates what lead to yo' heavenly mansion. Yas Lawd, let him in, fo' he were a good nigger, and never did no hurt to nobody. 'N Lawd fo'give his murderer, Simon. Let him go his way like he want to, 'n sin no mo'. Simon am sho' sorry fo' hisse'f 'n didn' mean to kill nobody, not even Moses. Forgive Simon, 'n wash him in de blood o' de lamb. Lawd Jesus, we grieves fo' de departed,

but we feels fo' de livin' Simon, 'n ax de protection o' de livin' Gawd.

(At this juncture Elvira notices that Simon has slipped out of the room into the darkness outside, but she says nothing, permitting her father to continue his prayer).

Lige—Dear Lawd we miss de departed, an' grieves dat he am no longer in our midst. Ef it was yo' holy will, we ud ax yuh to let him return to us, but being like he am dead he cain't—

Elvira (interrupting)—Mose it am all right now. Dat Simon trash am gone. He done took de wes' bound T 'n N. O. 'n am gwine fo' ever.

Moses (Rising and shaking himself)—Dat am good news honey.

Fanny—Lawdy Jesus, he am come to life.

Lige—De dead am restored to us 'n liveth.

Elvira—Mose done bought hisse'f a licenst at de Co'thouse.

Moses—'N 'tain't no huntin' license.

Lige—Great am de works o' de Lawd, my chilluns.

Fanny—Amen.

Crude and Unrefined

One-act Play

By

MARGARET ELIZABETH BOWEN

Free to amateur organizations where no charge is made, otherwise $7.50. Permission must be obtained from the publishers, Southwest Press

CRUDE AND UNREFINED

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Osage Annie ..... Servant
Mother ..... A Spartan
Dad ..... Of the Soil
Junior ..... The Striver
Catherine ..... His Thorn
Kimmie ..... The Cherub
A Driller.

Action takes place at the noon hour.

SCENE: Farm house Dining room.

The scene is in the dining room of a farm house in North Texas. An old timey side board is against the wall on the left and a long home-made table occupies the front center, with unpainted wooden benches along each side. At one end is an old arm chair with sunken leather bottom. This is Dad's Throne. A combination writing desk and glassed in book shelves is in center of right wall. It has a few volumes but many catalogs and rock specimens, showing thru the glass. At rear center is a window of eight panes, and thru it is seen the fitful flash of a

lease flare. Left rear, is a door leading out to the porch and a wash basin is just outside the door with a roller towel above it. A door leading off right downstage opens presumably to sleeping quarters, while the one opposite it on the left leads to the kitchen. The squeak of a walking beam and the screetch of the shackle rods are heard outside continuously. The curtain rises upon Osage Annie, shuffling around setting the table. She is a typical Osage Indian—sleek black hair parted in the middle; round fat face the color of preserved figs; and a slow steady waddle and monosyllabic grunts that occasionally break forth into crude philosophy. Her clothes are non-descriptly civilized—except for the beaded moccasins and beaded head band.

Mother enters from bed room door. She is a spartan type of woman, tall and well proportioned with broad calm brow from which the brown wavy hair is brushed straight back. In her becoming print house dress and flat heeled shoes, she is the acme of patience and wholesomeness. She places napkins of red and white at each place.

Mother—No signs of the children?—yet?

Annie (*Setting table. Without looking up*)—Bell not ring yet.

Mother—Well, dish up things, Annie. They'll be bobbin' in within ten minutes after it does—starved to death.

Annie—Sure. (*It's more of a grunt than an articulation*). She shuffles into kitchen while mother flutters over the table and hums "There's a Long, Long Trail a-Winding". Sounds of scraping boots on porch announce the arrival of Dad, who stops at the wash basin and very audibly makes his toilet, and leans his head around the door while wielding the roller towel.

Mother (*leaning against the door-jamb*)—Have the boys left the rig?

Dad (Enters, dressed in greasy field clothes—buckskin blouse, old riding pants, and laced leather boots. He takes worn note book out of shirt pocket and writes in it with the *stub of a pencil before replying.*) The first tower is on the way down to dinner now.

Mother (*Placing canister and extra dishes off the sideboard on the table.*) All right. How does it look today, Jim?

Dad—Not so good. The last time we bailed, I smelled sea-breezes.

Mother—Well, we'll know for sure any minute now. (*A Ford is heard at close range and at top speed. Mother rushes to the window.*) Here are the children. I hear the whoopie! (Dad whirls his "throne" over to the desk, sits down and lights his pipe, then goes thru some papers. Annie shuffles in with steaming bowls of food and a granite coffee pot. The children burst in shouting and scuffling. Junior, an awkward seventeen year old, whose

clothes can't keep pace with the growth of his arms and legs; Catherine, a freckled, bob-haired girl of about fifteen—wears a blue plaited skirt and white middie; and Kimmie, the youngest—*the darling of his Mother's eyes—wearing overalls.*

Junior—Hello, Dad. Here's the mail.

Catherine—Is dinner ready? I'm starved.

Kimmie—Where's Mother?

Mother—Here's Muvver, honey. Come give her a kissie-kiss.

Catherine—Mother, can't we go in to the movie tonite? They passed out bills at school—and it looks *keen. Let's go.* (*with a teasing intonation and side-long look at Dad*).

Mother—We'll see, dear. Go get the ice water now, and we'll see. Junior, was Kimmie a good boy today? (*Patting Kimmie on head*).

Junior—Oh, he's all right. Dad, how's the well comin' on?

Dad—About the same, son. The rig isn't unusually greasy yet.

Junior—Gosh! It's just *got* to come in. I don't want to go on livin' if it's a dry hole—after all I've planned to do.

Mother—Now! Now! Junior. Don't threaten the Lord. What will be WILL be, and if we need that well, we'll get it.

Junior—"Need it"! Heck, we've GOT to have it. The old farm can't give us anything more AS a FARM—and where are we? If we get a duster, I go to work and that's the last you'll see of *me*. (*With a wild threat and swagger*), *Mother and Dad exchange winks as if at an old story and look over-alarmed*).

Junior—You'll see, by gosh! I'll show you. (*With rising temper.*) Oh, I know you think I'm just a kid, but I'll grow up over night, when I know I'm here to stay—rooted to this damn stinking farm.

Mother—Why, Junior! (*Shocked*).

Dad—Cut that out, Son! (*Menacingly*).

Catherine—Oh, come on down to earth, all of you, and eat before I collapse in a corner.

Junior sullenly slumps into his place on the rear bench, after Dad has given him a disgusted shove on the back of the head. Mother shakes her head in puzzled worry, and gathers Kim to her side on the other end of the rear bench, nearest the kitchen. Catherine draws up a chair at one end of the table, and Annie replaces Dad's arm chair at the other.

Annie—Humph! Me stays on lease because me *likes* it (Exits).

Catherine—Gee! I'd like it *too*, if I had ten thousand a month coming in all the rest of my days and knew I could dig out any time I wanted to go.

Mother—Now, Honey, *please* let this matter drop.

Annie has seen both sides and when she stays on here, like she does, it's just because she's happier here.

Junior—Don't class *me* with an Osage half-wit.

Catherine—It's cause she's afraid of everything strange. That's all.

Dad—Say, what the hell started this fight anyhow? (*Shocked silence with a frozen stare from Mother*). Either we get this well or we break ground for cotton, and I can't see that any of us are going to starve to death either way she breaks. We never *have*. I've kept bread in your mouths for eighteen years and I hain't got my ticket bought for no where else. Shut up!

Kimmie (*Snuggling up close to his Mother*). Ma - a - ma!

Mother—(*Smoothing her hair straight back—as if to clear her brain*).Now, let's all be still unless we can make our air castles and enjoy them together. (*They eat a while in silence*).

Junior (*Bursts forth after a vain attempt to keep still*)—Well, Gee Gosh, does a guy haff to act tickled to death all the time, with a rocky old red dirt farm or start a family fight?

Mother—No, dear. We know you are too ambitious for that.

Catherine—That's not the idea. June's just pinin' for the great open spaces of a furnished room in some city with a morning newspaper.

Junior (*Furious*)—Ain't that a darn girl, for you? Make me sick!

Catherine (*Triumphant*)—Well, why *did* you send for that Journalism catalog from the correspondence school?

Junior (*Restful and embarrassed*)—Oh, shut your big mouth! You have to snoop and then blab all the rest of your life, I reckon.

Mother—Catherine, don't try to humiliate your brother. I suppose all of us dream of what we'll do when the well comes in. I'm sure I *hope* it will improve our lot.

Dad (*Slowly—as tho' hurt*)—Well by gum! When did you start complainin'?

Mother—Oh, Jim! I'm NOT complaining. It seems to me that we are all nervous or touchy today. Nothing seems right.

Dad (*Angrily*)—There y' are! "Nothin' seems right" and still you're "not complainin' " (*martyr-like.*) (*With louder voice*). What's wrong with this place, I'd like to know. (*Rising.*) It was good enough for you when I brung you here.

Mother—Hush, Jim, you've said enough.

Dad (*Shaking his fist*)—You can't shut *me* up like you do the kids. I'm sick of this everlastin' crabbin' from every durn one o' ye.

Junior (*Springing up near his mother*)—Well, what are you goin' to do about it?

Dad (*Making a lunge toward Junior*)—I'll *show* you, by God!

Mother steps in his way, and, in his blind anger, he shoves her away and she falls over the bench to the floor.

Catherine (*Screaming in terror*)—Dad! Oh, Mother!

Annie appears at the kitchen door. Kimmie runs crying to his mother and falls across her neck. Junior and Dad get to her side at the same time—one on each side and Catherine places Dad's throne for her at front center.

Mother (*Slowly opening her eyes as the family groups around her in loving solicitation*)—What happened?

Dad (*Dropping on one knee with a hoarse sob*)—The old man lost his head. That's all.

Junior—Aw, it was *my* fault. I egged him on.

Dad (*Utterly contrite*)—No, son, there's no excuse for me.

Mother (*Same old gesture of smoothing back hair*)—Well, it's over now, and it's a good time for us to check up and see just how much happiness sudden wealth can bring into our individual lives.

Catherine—If this is a sample, I hope to heaven the old well caves in. We can get along better without it.

Junior—*Sure!* I wouldn't run away and leave here anyhow, Ma!

Driller (*At porch door*)—Hey, Jim, hard luck! But she's a dry hole.

Dad—Hot Dawg! Boy, who cares? (*To Junior*) —(*Laying his arm across his shoulder.*) We'll start settin' out cotton on the south eighty tomorrow, son!

Mother (*Brushing away a tear and then smiling*) —Come here—all of you. I want you to know how proud Mother is of every one of you. (Curtain goes down as she bundles them into her arms, and Annie shuffles around, clearing the table and humming "*There's a Long, Long Trail a-Winding into the Land of my Dreams.*"

The Coward

By

MARJORIE GARNETT

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THE COWARD

ONE-ACT PLAY

CAST

Joel Jackson—the coward; Mrs. Jackson—a widow; Molly Jackson—her daughter; Frances—Joel's sweetheart; Benny—a soldier.

SETTING

In a rude frontier cabin in Texas during the time of the revolution. The cabin is sparsely furnished with only the necessities of life.

ACT I—SCENE I

Molly—I am living in suspense. Everything is so upset by the war. Robert has been killed, and Sam is fighting. Mother and I have to work so hard, and every minute we are afraid of the Mexicans.

Frances—I know it's hard, but don't Joel protect you?

Molly—Yes, he does, but he should be fighting.

Frances—Why you know he would go right away, if he was old enough. He is only sixteen, you know, and he works harder than either you or Mrs. Jackson.

Molly—You always seem to excuse Joel somehow, I know! I believe you like him.

Frances (coloring)—No—no—well—yes.

Molly—Well, I thought so, but I think you are making a mistake. Why Sam is crazy about you, and when he comes home from war—if he does—he will marry you. Joel can't hold a candle to Sam, and you know it.

Frances—I don't care what you say. I like Joel best, and I always will.

(Enter Mrs. Jackson).

Mrs. Jackson—What's all this? Hello Frances, glad to see you. Any news from the settlement?

Frances—Nothing new, but have you heard all the news from the front?

Mrs. Jackson—No, I don't know any more than I did since I got Sam's letter, telling me of the death of my Robert. (She paused and covered her face with her apron sobbing).

Molly—Mother, mother, don't cry, don't cry. Robert died for his country and his people. He was a hero. Hadn't you rather he would die fighting like a man? Mother, oh, Mother wouldn't you give your sons for Texas?

Mrs. Jackson—Yes, Molly, you are right. I willingly give my son for Texas. I will sacrifice everything, but it would be easier for me to give my own life than the life of my boy. Now Sam is is fighting. Oh God, I hope he is spared, but yet I would lose him if by his death Texas could be free.

Frances—Mrs. Jackson, I admire you. You are so brave, and work so hard, and suffer so many hardships.

Mrs. Jackson—Frances, it helps me just to look at you. You are a comfort to anyone. I would be so, so glad to have you for a daughter-in-law.

Frances—Oh, Mrs. Jackson!

Mrs. Jackson—Yes, I mean it. Sam is in love with you, the dear boy. In his letter he told me to kiss you for him.

Frances (*confused*)—But—but—oh—oh—

Mrs. Jackson—And I am going to carry out his wish. (Kisses Frances on the cheek).

(Enter Joel).

Joel—Hello everybody. Why hello Frances. So glad to see you. What news from town?

Mrs. Jackson (sternly)—Joel, did you chop that cotton in the northeast corner of the patch?

Joel—Yes, ma.

Mrs. Jackson—Did you water the oxen?

Joel—Yes.

Mrs. Jackson—Did you bring in the wood?

Joel—Yes, and that's all I've got to do.

Mrs. Jackson—Go harness the old ox and drive Frances home. She walked all the way here just to see us.

Joel (smiling at Frances)—I'd be delighted to drive you home.

(Exit Joel).

Frances—Mrs. Jackson, don't you think Joel is handsome?

Mrs. Jackson—Handsome? My goodness me! Poor Robert was so handsome, but I can't see it in Joel.

Molly—Well for once, Frances, I agree with you. I do think Joel is good looking.

(Enter Joel).

Joel (bowing)—The carriage is awaiting you, my lady.

Frances (curtsying)—My lord, I am coming. (Joel escorts her out).

(Exit Joel and Frances).

Molly—Mother, how cute they are together.

Mrs. Jackson—No, she is for Sam.

Molly—Mother, why is it you never seem to love Joel as much as Robert and Sam?

Mrs. Jackson—Listen daughter, while I tell you. Joel is not my son.

Molly (astonished)—What! No, mother, not really!

Mrs. Jackson—Yes, it is true. His mother was my sister, and she married a handsome young man whom she had only known two weeks. He was a cowardly deserter from the United States Army. He ran away from danger. He deserted my sister when Joel was three months old. Two months later my sister died. I took the poor little baby and raised him as my own son. My sister had named him Joel after her despisable husband. I hated that man with all my heart. He caused the death of my sister. Joel is like him. He looks like him; he acts like him; and try as I may I cannot love him as I do my own two sons. Later Joel's father was shot when he was trying to get away with a stolen horse. I have never told Joel anything. Don't you, because I want to make a man of him, if I can.

Molly—Why doesn't he enlist?

Mrs. Jackson—I told him once to go but he wouldn't. I am afraid he would turn a traitor or coward, and I could not stand the disgrace after Robert has given his life so nobly. Sam is fighting so bravely for his country.

Molly—Mother, I think I understand, and I will never tell him.

Mrs. Jackson—I knew you wouldn't, Molly, or I would never have told you. You are one girl who can keep secrets.

Molly—What is Joel's real name?

Mrs. Jackson—It is Joel Mansfield.

Molly—Joel Mansfield?

Mrs. Jackson—Yes, and how I despise that name! Joel's father appeared so gallant and charming. No wonder my poor sister fell in love with him. Everyone liked this dashing fellow. No one knew what he really was.

Molly—That's just like Joel, Mother.

Mrs. Jackson—Yes indeed, I am afraid that boy will cause me trouble.

Molly—And he is in love with Frances.

Mrs. Jackson (sadly)—Oh, I know that only too well, and he will win her, too. That is why I am trying to help my Sam. He loves her and will make her a far better husband that Joel ever could.

Molly—Sh, sh! Here comes Joel.

(Enter Joel).

Joel—Well folks, I escorted my fair lady to her place of abode without a mishap.

Mrs. Jackson—Well then, peel those potatoes.

Joel (Scornfully)—That is a girl's job. Me peel potatoes? I should say not. Peel the potatoes, Molly.

Molly—I will, Joel, if you'll milk Bess for me.

Joel (tickling her chin)—Sure I will for you.

I simply love to milk a cow,
I think it's very jolly,
I really don't mind it at all
If I'm doing it for Molly.

How's that for a rhyme? Wonderful boy, I am. Behold! milkmaid and poet all in one! Don't you think I am a wonderful boy, Molly?

Molly—Ah, Joel.
(Exit Joel).

Mrs. Jackson—I just wish I could get more news of the war. It looks mighty bad to me. It seems as if those damnable Mexicans have the upper hand. If they win and put us back under their subjection then my boy's life would have been given in vain. Why—why—I would—I would—I—don't know what I would do! It would be more than I could stand.

Molly—Don't talk of such things, Mother. I will go out and see if I can gather any news.
(Exit Molly).

Mrs. Jackson busies herself in straightening up the cabin. She sweeps the floor, stirs the kettle boiling over the fireplace, and sets things in order.
(Enter Joel).

Joel—Well, mother, the cow is milked, and the milk is put up. Yes, I washed the buckets. I'll tell you before you ask me. Where is Molly?

Mrs. Jackson—She has gone to see if she can find out anything of the fighting.

Joel—Mother, I guess you wonder why I don't fight for Texas. I have two good reasons. One is that I am too young; another is that I have to care for you and Molly. What would happen if I deserted you? You know you can't get along without me. I help Texas the most by protecting my mother and sister from the vile Mexicans.
(Enter Molly hurriedly).

Molly (excitedly)—Oh, Mother, Mother, the Mexicans—the Mexicans are coming. We had better flee. Quick, oh hurry!

Mrs. Jackson—Molly, Molly, dear girl, compose yourself.

Molly—But Mother, if the Mexicans come they will kill us all.

Mrs. Jackson—Keep still, child. I will run from no Mexicans. Not even before Santa Anna, himself, would I move a step. My husband and I fought for this land, and it cost him his life. Here have I raised my children and here I will remain. Come on, come on. I challenge you, cowardly Mexican dogs to come and kill, and destroy! You have killed one son, and another is fighting, just come on and exterminate what is left of us for I will never run from you. No, never!

Molly—Mother!

Mrs. Jackson—I mean every word. Now you two, off to bed. Forget the Mexicans. They will not come.

(Exit Molly and Joel).

Mrs. Jackson extinguishes the lamp, and sits meditating by the dying embers of the fireplace. Someone knocks on the door.

Voice from Outside—Mrs. Jackson, open the door!

(Mrs. Jackson opens the door).

(Enter Frances).

Mrs. Jackson—Frances! The Mexicans, have they come? Quick, have they come?

Frances—No, no. Mrs. Jackson, sit down, and light the lamp.

Mrs. Jackson—Frances, Frances, tell me. Oh, I am afraid. It is bad news. I know, I feel it is. Call Molly.

Frances (knocking on the door)—Molly, call Joel, and come in. It is Frances.

(Enter Molly).

Molly—What is wrong? What is it?

Frances—Call Joel.

Molly (going to the door)—Joel, come in quick. Joel, Joel, hurry.

(Enter Joel).

Joel—What has happened?

Frances—Sit down all of you. I will tell you as quickly as I can.

Mrs. Jackson—Oh, Sam. It is Sam.

Frances (trembling)—I just heard. I came as fast as I could tell you, but—but—Was Sam with Travis in the Alamo?

Mrs. Jackson—Yes (sobbing). Yes, oh my son, my boy.

Frances—Travis had one hundred and fifty men at the Alamo, and Sunday Santa Anna stormed the Alamo with three thousand men. (Tearfully). It was terrible—a massacre—every man in it killed, and Sam, Sam was in there, Crockett and Bowie too. I—I can't—just can't talk of it or think of it. Mrs.

Jackson, I wanted to be the one to tell you. Oh, Sam died a hero and has won an imperishable glory. He defended Texas, and gave his life like Robert. Mrs. Jackson, be proud, be proud of your sons.

Mrs. Jackson—My boy, my Sam; Robert and Sam, my sacrifice on the altar for Texas freedom. God grant us victory, after such a price as I have paid.

Molly (putting her arm around her mother)—Come Mother, come in the other room. It is more than you can bear, now.

(Exit Mrs. Jackson and Molly).

Frances—Joel, it is awful. Poor Mrs. Jackson.

Joel (catching her hand)—Frances, dear, I feel sorry for Mother. She has had more than her share, it seems.

Frances (drawing away her hand)—Why don't you fight? Why don't you avenge Sam and Robert's death. Why do you stay at home when all *men* are fighting? Don't you love your country?

Joel—Frances, Frances, you don't understand. Let me tell you—

Frances—Don't say a word. I understand perfectly—you are a coward.

(Joel stands speechless staring at her. Goes towards the door).

Frances—Joel, Joel where are you going?

Joel—To war, I will prove to you that I am not what you say.

(Exit Joel).

Frances (screaming)—Molly, oh, Molly, Mrs. Jackson!

(Enter Molly and Mrs. Jackson).

Molly—Frances, what is it now?

Frances—Oh, Joel, Joel's gone.

Mrs. Jackson—Gone?

Molly—Gone where?

Frances—To fight.

Mrs. Jackson—To fight? Joel?

Frances (crying)—Yes, yes, it is all my fault. I—I told him he was a coward, and he left and said he was going to prove that what I said wasn't so. Oh, Joel, Joel, if anything happens to him I am to blame.

Molly—There, there, Frances don't take it so hard. Other boys have gone to war before.

Frances—But—but Joel is different.

Molly—I am so glad he was man enough to go.

Mrs. Jackson—I was afraid of this.

Frances—Afraid of what?

Mrs. Jackson.—Nothing, nothing, child, but he left on the spur of the moment while his temper was hot. I don't know what he will do when he cools down.

Molly—Mother, Mother, don't talk so. You are worried, and not yourself. Come, lets all go to bed. Frances you must stay tonight.

(Exit Frances, Mrs. Jackson and Molly).

ACT I—SCENE II

(Enter Mrs. Jackson and Molly).

Mrs. Jackson—Molly, how long has it been since Sam was killed in the Alamo, and Joel went away?

Molly—Almost a month, Mother.

Mrs. Jackson—It is lonesome without Joel. I never realized how much he really meant to me until he went away. It seems strange we get no letters from him.

Molly—All I have been able to find out is that he joined General Houston's Army.

Mrs. Jackson—It seems that everything is against us. We have been defeated so far. All our remaining hope is with Houston.

Molly—And he is fast retreating, they say.

Mrs. Jackson—Yes, I have given up. I have lost my spirit. Nothing seems the same anymore. I am merely existing . . . there is nothing to live for.

Molly—Yes, it is bad but we must face the worst squarely. There may be something left for us yet.

(Mrs. Jackson goes to the open door and gazes out over the prairies).

Mrs. Jackson—What a magnificient sunset—all splendid and red. It is the sunset of my life, my hopes. Watch! slowly, slowly, it is sinking. Soon it will be dark. That will mean despair. Oh, it is

fading, going down, leaving me in darkness. Come to me, Molly. You are all that is left. See the sunset? See its meaning? Ah, it has vanished. We are doomed.

Molly—Please, Mother, please don't talk so. It is madness. Don't you know that after every sunset comes the dawn? Sunset is a sign of dying sorrow, for happiness will dawn tomorrow.

Mrs. Jackson—Oh, Molly, dear I hope you are right.

Molly—Come, we must fix supper.

(They set the table with rude bowls and two wooden spoons. Soup is poured from the kettle into the bowls. Then they sit down and begin to eat).

(Enter Frances).

Frances—Pardon me, please, I didn't know you were at supper.

Mrs. Jackson—You are welcome any time, Frances. Come, sit down.

(Frances pulls up a chair).

Molly—What is it, Frances? You seem fairly bursting with good news.

Frances—I can't hold it any longer. Texas is free!

(Molly jumps up knocking over her chair).

Mrs. Jackson—Say it again, Frances, say it again.

Frances—Freedom! Freedom! Glorious freedom! Santa Anna was defeated at San Jacinto! Hail Houston, our victorious commander!

Molly—Joel! Joel! Joel! Wasn't he with Houston?

Frances (joyously)—Yes!

Mrs. Jackson (crying)—It is too much, and all at once. I thought life's sunset had come. Now in a few minutes life is rosy once more.

Molly—Rosy! Why it's bright red with happiness. I told you. I told you.

Frances—And Joel will be coming home to us again.

Molly—And everything will be lovely once more. Let's eat our supper before it gets cold.

Mrs. Jackson—This is the first happiness I have had in many a year.

Molly—Tell us the details, Frances.

Frances—It was a surprise attack. Benny was sent to spread the victory, and he gave me all the particulars. He said that Houston planned the attack. You see, the Mexicans had been following Houston, thinking he was retreating. Of course, he really was but he was also leading them into a trap. At San Jacinto Houston pitched camp. The men were tired from the hard marching and Houston said they would attack the next day. The following day in the afternoon when all the Mexicans were taking their siesta, the Texans swarmed down on them. Deaf Smith and some others had cut down Vince's bridge so there was no retreat; they had to win. The Texans cried "Remember the Alamo" and "Remember Goliad". They simply slaughtered

the Mexicans, so Benny says. It was a very decisive battle, and Santa Anna was captured. Isn't it all too wonderful? Benny said the poor Mexicans would cry "Me no Alamo" "Me no Goliad". The battle was over in about eighteen minutes, but the chase and captures went on 'till that night. I asked Benny about Joel. He said he was in the battle, but that he was coming over here tonight to tell you all about him. He said he had a note from Joel, but he wouldn't tell me anything about it. One reason I came over here tonight was to be here when he comes.

Mrs. Jackson—How did he look when he told you about Joel?

Frances—Why he looked—well—I guess sort of grave. But you can't tell about Benny, he's always fooling you about things.

Mrs. Jackson—Grave?

Molly—But, Mother it doesn't mean a thing. I know Benny. He is always being mysterious about the simplest things.

Mrs. Jackson—But that isn't a simple thing—Joel's message.

Frances—No, we will just have to wait for Benny.
(Knocking is heard outside).

Mrs. Jackson—It's Benny. Open the door Molly.

(Molly opens the door).
(Enter Benny).

Mrs. Jackson—Good evening, Benny, have a chair.

Benny—Has Frances told you of our glorious victory?

Molly—Of course.

Mrs. Jackson—Benny, Frances says you have a note from Joel.

Benny (solemnly)—Yes.

Mrs. Jackson (impatiently)—Well, for goodness sake, let me see it.

Benny—It is for Frances.

Frances—For me?

Benny—Yes, Frances, I do not know what it contains. It was only given me to deliver, but I fear—

Molly—Oh, no, nothing of the kind. Joel never tells bad news.

(Benny takes the letter from his pocket, and hands it to Frances. She reads it through, catches on to the back of a chair and lets the letter flutter to the floor. Molly picks it up and reads it aloud).

To My Dearest, Beloved Frances—I am dying, slowly dying. The bullet in my side is torturing me while I write. Texas is free. I have given my life. There is only one thing I want to do before I die, and I am doing it now. You know I loved you. Before you get this letter, I will be gone. That is why I write. You said such cruel words to me, but I forgive you. You were right, I had to prove myself. You made a man of me. I owe all to you, darling. My dying words are—I am not a coward.

THE END

Texas History Play

THE CAVALIER FROM FRANCE

By

JAN ISBELLE FORTUNE

(129)

TEXAS HISTORY PLAY

The Cavalier from France

The time is 1685. The scene is in La Salle's room at Ft. St. Louis on the Lavaca River. La Salle and his group of colonists have invaded Spanish territory and established the first white settlement in what is now the state of Texas. La Salle and his men are on the point of going forth on further explorations. This is La Salle's second voyage to the new world. On a former trip he had come down the Mississippi River. But when he came again seeking the great river, he had been unable to locate it. Provisions have run low. There is much dissatisfaction in the camp.

The characters in the order of their appearance: Father Duval, a priest; Rene Robert Cavalier, Le Sieur La Salle, of France; Jean Reneaud, an orphan girl whose brother died of the fever early in the expedition; Duhaut; Morganet.

As the curtain rises it reveals a roughly hewn log house with small apertures for defense against the Indians, who till now have been friendly enough; the room is furnished with a crude table, chairs, and a bunk against a wall. To the left is a door leading to a similar room in

the fort; to the right is the heavily barred outer door. A single candle gutters on the table, at which are seated La Salle and Father Duval. In the room beyond there is first heard the sound of shouts, laughter, and song. Then Father Duval speaks sadly:

Father Duval—La Salle, my son, it is a sorry deed these men of yours have done. I see no cause for all this merrymaking.

La Salle—I know Father. They did wrong to steal the canoes from the Indians. I sent hatchets for honorable exchange. But the heathens apparently could make neither head nor tail of my men's sign language.

(More laughter and shouts).

Father—That's no excuse for taking what is not theirs. I fear that trouble will come of it if the Indians discover who has done the thieving. We should come into this new land to set an example before these savages—not for brigandage.

La Salle—I know—I know. But Duhaut could not make them understand. He said he spoke and made motions till he was fit to burst with anger and red in the face. But all they did was to stand and gape like fools. And then, Morganet, who's ever hot of head and quick of temper, devised the plan of taking the canoes after the dusk had fallen. And after all, Father, we are in straits for boats. We must have canoes if we go up the river.

Father—True, my son. But we do not need them badly enough to steal them. And if the Indians discover the trickery, they'll be down upon this fort like maddened wolves.

La Salle—They're simple as children, these savages.

Father—And as unreasonable as children when they're angry. (Pauses). They're getting very gay in there. The wine is working. (Loud sounds of laughter, shouts, voice chanting: "We'll fill the brimming wassail bowl and drink health to our ladies—and drink health to our ladies—and drink health to our ladi-ees". More shouts, pounding tables, laughter).

La Salle—Yes, tonight they celebrate. In three days, we start to look for the Mississippi once more. The lack of canoes were all that held us back. Pray for us; Father, in this strange and alien land.

Father—I will, my son. I shall pray daily for your safe return. God grant it, and that there be no bloodshed with these Indians. It is not right that we should war with them. This is their land and they—(Enter Jean, breathless).

Jean—Monsieur Le Cavalier—the little Indian boy—the one you saved from drowning last Sabbath—he has been here—he says that the Indians—he says

La Salle and Father—Yes—yes—

Jean—He says that the tribe is making war medicine around the camp-fire tonight—because that

Monsieur Morganet and Monsieur Dahaut took their canoes and many buffalo skins—he says they will attack—

La Salle—The fools—the fools—to have risked bringing this upon us.

Father—it means massacre, Cavalier yes, my child—quickly—and then what?

Jean—He said they would burn the fort and scalp the men—and carry the women into captivity. And then he scuttled away into the shadows—and I closed the aperture—and ran to tell you—

La Salle—An attack—and the men all filled with foggy thoughts from wine. The women and children, Jean, tell them I said to go quickly into the inner room and remain. Go quickly. Run. (Calling). Duhaut—Morganet—Come in here!

(Shouts and laughter).

La Salle—The fools—the fools—better to wait another six months for the Indians to become friendly and trade with us than to be wiped out in one night because of haste for boats. God, to undo this deed before the innocents suffer! Well, if they attack, they shall pay dear for it. Hand me the powder, Father, and let me load. (Door opens and closes).

Morganet (Tipsy)—Le Cavalier—hic—desired our presence?

La Salle (sharply)—Slap that drunkenness from your face, Morganet. The Indians are preparing an attack on the fort.

Morganet—Duhaut, Indians—did you hear that? Indians are—hic—preparing to attack.

Duhaut (also tipsy)—Most peculiar thing, Morganet. Never really get to enjoying myself in this new country but what Cavalier doesn't send word that Indians on warpath or lions outside, or bears climbing up fort or something, ever notice it?

Morganet—Just gonna mention it myself—peculiar—very peculiar. Now take the Indians, f'r instance,—peculiar race of people—very peculiar—especially 'bout canoes—but sociable—peaceable—no harm to 'em. And he says—hic—they're gonna attack? Idea of them attacking us! 's absurd—perfectly absurd.

Duhaut—What Le Cavalier need is l'il drink—that's all—just a l'il drink—

La Salle—Father, can you make them realize the seriousness of this—or must I bat their heads together till they're sober?

Father—Here you, Duhaut—stop it! Look at me—can you shoot? Can you? We need you—

Duhaut—Asks me can I shoot! Did you hear that? Asks me can I shoot? Me—when I cut my teeth on a gun butt—can I shoot—

La Salle—What's that? (Pause). They're coming—the Indians are coming,—(Long Indian yippee heard in the distance, thud of many horses' feet).

La Salle (Flinging open door of room on the revelers)—Every man to his post, full-armed. The

Indians are upon us. Put out the lights. Wait for no command. Fire and reload and fire! Here, Duhaut, here's powder—here Morganet. Blow out the candle, Father. Here's an extra gun if one of yours should jam—

Father—I'll take the extra gun, my son. Let Duhaut and Morganet look to their own weapons.

La Salle—Fire men! Don't wait—they must not gain entrance—(roar of guns—shouts, yippees of Indians).

La Salle—Down went that beggar! Oh, you would, would you? (roar of gun). We'll see.

Morganet—God, where's that powder horn? I can't see to load. (more guns roar).

Father—You should have learned to load in the dark, my son. Ah! (gun roar). That's three more.

Duhaut (Pettishly)—I can't see the heathens in this starlight.

La Salle—Don't blame your poor vision on the starlight, Duhaut. I can see them well enough.

Cry—Oh, God; Cavalier—Cavalier!

Father—Some one is wounded, my son.

La Salle (a little distance away)—Pierre has an arrow thru his shoulder. I can't get it out in the dark. He's bleeding badly. Are the beggars closing in?

(More gun roars—shouts—groans—wild Indian yells).

Father—Do you need help, Cavalier? I cannot well leave my post.

La Salle—I'm afraid he's done for—poor lad.

(Enter Jean).

Jean—Monsieur Le Cavalier—I heard some one cry out -

La Salle—You must get back to the women where it is more sheltered, Jean.

Jean—No—no—we may all die soon, anyway. Give me a gun.

La Salle—Father, tell her to go back.

Jean—No, Father do not send me back. Let us help—

(Guns again, Indian yells, cries of "More powder —more powder!")

Jean—I can carry the powder to the men.

Father—I will carry the powder, my child. But Pierre has an arrow thru his shoulder. Is there anything you can do for him in the dark?

Jean—Where—where—at which post, Cavalier? Oh, here! the terrible thing—all winged with feathers. I can feel them—Pierre—Pierre! He doesn't answer. Cavalier, he is unconscious. Let me carry him in to the women. Madame Burchard is stirring some herbs on a tiny flame. We will dress the wound—

(Another roar of guns).

La Salle—Carry him—you carry him Jean? He's dead weight.—

Jean (Laughing)—You do not know, Cavalier, how strong I am. See, like a baby I lift him. He is very slight. Careful—in the dark I tread upon your toes,—I will be back, Monsieurs. (Shout, gun shots again).

Father—Well, my son, I powdered them all around. I think it's nearly over. Duhaut, Morganet, —do you need more powder?

Duhaut—No, Father I still have several rounds left. They seem to be going, though one can't be sure.

Morganet—We took good count of them. How many of our men are out?

Father—Only two with slight wounds—except for Pierre. Thank God for that.

Silence. Desultory shots. (Silence again).

La Salle—They're gone now. They weren't expecting us to be all ready for them. I'm glad indeed I happened to earn the gratitude of the In--dian lad. See Duhaut, and you, too, Morganet, what your thievery has done for us? I sent you with hatchets to trade for the canoes and skins. Have you no thought of the innocent ones who must suffer for your deed?

Duhaut (Sullenly)—You know we had to have the canoes, Sire.

La Salle—True—but little good they'd have done us if the Indian had burned the fort. Or worse still, lifted the scalps from our heads. Think twice be-

fore you do such another fool-hardy thing. I'll not countenance it, do you understand.

Duhaut (Sullenly)—Yes, Sire.

La Salle—Come, Father, let us go in to the women and see how Pierre is faring. Make no light yet awhile, Duhaut. The Indians need have no such sure target, should they return. Careful, Father, that door sill. Jean—Jean, we are coming to see after Pierre, Father and I.

Jean (A little away)—Here, Sire, to the right. (Sound of closing door). (Silence).

Duhaut (Fiercely)—A fine one—La Salle—to blame us with the raid—when he's a helpless leader who does not even know where the Mississippi River is, now that he's away from it.

Morganet—And as for boats to go exploring with—he'd never have had them unless we had caught those savages napping and lifted them. I'll tell you, Duhaut, this colony needs a real man at the head of it—one who can take the leadership.

Duhaut—There you spoke the truth, lad. Twice already the provisions have run low. My belly never knew the feel of my backbone before this trip. And then the fever at Matagorda. La Salle himself scarce recovered from it. He's still a shadow. He'll be a burden on the voyage. We need a man at the head of this. (Silence).

Morganet—This cursed dark! A light would be most welcome. The shadows make me creepy.

Duhaut—Let's have a drink—that'll put heart into us again—that will chase the shadows. Here's the bottle, Morganet, drink deep. (Silence). Ay, you spoke the truth. This expedition needs a man at the head of it.

Morganet—A—ah, but the liquor does warm one. (Silence).

Duhaut—This colony were better off without La Salle. I even believe his maps are useless, for all the pains he's been to make them so carefully. 'Tis certain he cannot find the Mississippi again. And the Indians will be anything but friendly after this. Yes, I think we need a real man to lead us, Morganet, a real man.

Morganet—I agree with you, Duhaut.

Duhaut—Yes, it needs a man. Here's the bottle, Morganet. Let's drink again—to the success of the expedition. With a real leader! One with initiative.

Morganet—To the success of the expedition!

Duhaut (Significantly)—To the success of the expedition! Morganet! (Silence).

Morganet—We'd have had no canoes if I hadn't—

Duhaut—Sure, he even owes his boats to you—take another drink. It takes a man to overcome such obstacles. We need one like you as our leader.

La Salle's Voice (Heard distantly)—I have a soothing lotion, Jean, that I brought with me from France. Perhaps that will ease the pain. (Voice

nearer). In the dark it may be difficult to find, but I think I remember. (Door opens and closes. Voice normal). Was it on the shelf or in my dispatch box? Morganet—Duhaut—perhaps we may strike a light now. Pierre is suffering—make a light —what—God—my—side—who fired? Oh—oh (falls). (Silence).

Duhaut—Is he dead?

Morganet—God grant it. This expedition needs a man at the head of it.

Duhaut (Significantly)—Aye—one man, Morganet.

Morganet (Not noticing)—Yes, he's dead. His heart has stopped. I'll take his sword and cloak and boots. By rights, they're mine—I killed him. A leader needs fine clothes. And this expedition needs a man. Ha, those boots come off easily. Go, but the fever's shrunk him. Now the award—it is a lovely sword. The King himself gave it to him, all carved and jeweled. Many's the time I've watched it flashing in the sun—

Duhaut (Menacingly)—The expedition needs a man, Morganet. *One* man.

Morganet—Eh? Yes, of course, a man. I always like the lining of coat—'tis a pretty color—

Duhaut—Fool! The expedition needs a man—and I am the man. Ah, there! You admired La Salle's sword,—Mine is not jewelled but the blade is just as keen. Taste that!—the colonists would

never follow you anywhere—you drunken fool. (Morganet falls). Fancy *you* wearing the Cavalier's clothes.

(Silence) The door opens and closes steathily. (Silence again).

Jean (Calling off stage)—Sire—Sire, did you find the lotion? Pierre has dozed a little. Perhaps I can help—(clearer). Sire—Sire—The latch sticks. There! Mother of God! There is the smell of blood here—the smell of blood—and the silence of death. (pauses). (In frightened tones). Father—Father—come quickly—bring a light—bring a light, Pierre,

Father—What is it my child? What is wrong?

Jean—Father, Father, I am afraid. There is an awful stillness in this room—and no one answers—oh, I am afraid—afraid!

Father—Cavalier! My son—answer, my son! Morganet—Duhaut! Where could they have gone? Jean, say nothing—say nothing to the others—but bring a light—bring a light quickly, my child. (pause).

Jean—Father, here is a brand—there is a candle by the door. Light it. There! God, have mercy—have mercy—Oh Cavalier—Cavalier!

Father—Dead—murdered and stripped—like any common criminal. My son—my son—God grant him peace—God shrive his soul! And Morganet dead too—Duhaut and his colleague must have quarreled. They were like two brothers before the Indians came.

Jean—Oh, the dogs—the swine—I would I were a man! I'd take a sword and run this Duhaut thru. I'd let him taste of steel—I'd like—

Father—Jean—Jean—peace, child. Such harsh words are not for your lips.

Jean—But to have act upon him in the dark—the gentlest bravest man that ever walked.

Father—A brave and pious man—I knew him in his youth when he was in the Jesuit School. His father did not like his lack of worldliness. He drove him from his home because he sowed no wild oats like other boys. A fool he called him—a lad who lacked a lad's desires, he said. My son, my son—to see him thus. Yes, he is dead—quite dead. His heart is still—and Morganet's too—

Jean—That dog! As if it mattered! I'm glad he's dead! 'Twas his and that other's doing that we had the raid tonight—that Pierre lies wounded! Oh, I could kill him over again—

Father—Peace, child, peace—let me think what is best to do—what is the best for all of us. The Indians must not know of this—they would assuredly destroy us all if they should learn that La Salle was dead—slain by his own men. We must take him out tonight and bury him where none may ever know.

Jean—The Indians would dig him up and take his scalp—it would be a trophy for them—the scalp of the Cavalier le Sieur La Salle—

Father—You are strong, Jean, and brave, else you would have never followed this expedition after your brothers' death at Matagorda. Can you help me to carry him out and bury him?

Jean (Passionately)—I could carry him alone if need be, Father, and I can wield a spade like any man, if we must dig his grave.

Father—Then lift him child, there by his knees. Gently, gently. He's light from long fasting and fever. Blow out the light. We dare not open the outer door with a light still burning. Careful, child, careful.

Jean—Wait—wait, Father. Do not open the door yet. I must get something—I must find it—wait—

Father—What is it, child?

Jean—His map—his map—I know well where he kept it. He shall hold it in his hands. They shall not have that. His sword—his cloak—even his boots—but clothes of La Salle will not make a La Salle of any man—they'll soon learn that. Oh, I have found it—there, Cavalier, keep what is yours—keep it forever, I, Jean, give it to you. (sobs). Father, swear by the Holy Mother that you shall tell no man where we shall lay the Cavalier—no one! Not even though death be the penalty of silence. For Duhaut will seek to know. And he is leader now. Swear, Father, I pray you.

Father—I swear my child, that none shall ever know where La Salle lies buried. Lift him now and

blow out the candle. We must keep well to the shadows.

Jean—Yes, Father.

Father—Is he a burden, child? Your breath comes catchy.

Jean (sobbing)—No, Father, the Cavalier is not a burden—it is my heart—it is my heart—

So the Cavalier from France was borne forth to an unknown grave in a strange and alien country, and the villian Duhaut left in charge of the helpless little colony at old Ft St. Louis, none of whom ever lived to see the Mississippi or the shores of France again.